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Legends of highwaymen

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Legends of Highwaymen and Others





Legends of Highwaymen and Others

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Collected by the late
R. Blakeborough

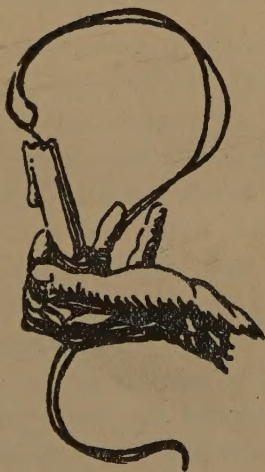
Edited by
J. Fairfax-Blakeborough, M.C.

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Preface

*When a land forgets its legends,
Sees but falsehoods in the past,
When a nation views its sires
In the light of fools and liars—
'Tis a sign of its decline,
And its glories cannot last.
Branches that but blight their roots
Yield no sap for lasting fruit.—Anon.*

141733

On the fly-leaf of a notebook (included in over a ton of manuscript which my father, the late Richard Blakeborough, left behind) the above lines were written. I quote them as indicative of the temper in which he spent his life, collecting lore and legend, and his attitude thereto. Incidentally, too, the spirit of the lines may act as a stimulant to sympathy with the folk-tales included within these covers. My father, who died on 23rd April 1918, whilst I was on active service in France, was fortunate as a collector in many respects. He began, what was to him a labour of love, at a time when there were still living many who belonged to the stage-coach era—an epoch when news travelled slowly, when books and newspapers were comparatively scarce, and when the traditional folk-tales largely supplied the excitement and romance which now comes through the channels of the printing press. This was an intensely interesting period in the evolution of

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country life. It was the springboard, so to speak, of the transition from what were termed "the good old days" to those of mechanical "hustle," of materialism and scepticism. Intercommunication, free education, and all their attendants, did much to kill the poetry of the countryside, and to destroy local patriotism—for there was a real local as well as a national patriotism which was a dominant influence in rural districts. You may call it "insularity," "lack of circumspection," "a narrow and restricted outlook," as you will. It was, nevertheless, something which rang true—maybe a legacy of the old community system, possibly clannish, self-contained, and, until then, more or less self-sufficient. Microcosms each district might be, but none the less cosmic. The roots struck back into the past and were impatient of coming events which were heralded. At such a period, then, did the late R. Blakeborough begin to fill notebook after notebook with old songs, quaint stories, traditional folk-tales, curious beliefs and customs, and all one means by "local lore." Not only was he fortunate in the period of his labours, but also in his own sympathetic understanding of the type of character whose memories he was to tap. Without these attributes he could not have succeeded as he did. There is even yet a stolid reserve and reticence in the make-up of the Northerner. It is an integral part of our personality. Strangers often ascribe it to poverty of words, inability to grasp the import of questions or to marshal ideas; to wilful obtuseness and uncommunicativeness. The fact of the matter is—and it was exaggerated in my father's early days—the Northerner is suspicious of strangers and does not readily open his heart or mind to those whom he imagines are idly curious or are seeking to "draw" him, as a terrier tries to draw a badger—

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merely for sport. The hardy folk of the Northern Counties are hypersensitive in their fear of being "laughed at" for what they have been taught to think are amusing peculiarities and idiosyncrasies. So one still has to break through their natural guard and reticence ere one reaches the real man and truth. By truth I mean truth in the Ruskin sense—something which is inherent and natural, which is free from the embroidery of tawdry make-belief; something which is fundamental and fits into the weft and warp and gives character and individuality to the whole. My late father knew exactly how to approach the scores of old folk with whom it was his joy to sit. A Northerner himself, he possessed that caution (as well as sympathy) essential to success in the rich fields whose harvest he spent his life in gathering. He did not drive a coach-and-four with sounding horn along the main road, or proceed thereon as in a cavalry charge, but went quietly and by easy stages along bypaths and grassy lanes to reach his goal. What one had forgotten he found another could remember, and over a period of nearly half a century he continued fitting in a link here and a link there, discovering old diaries and entries in family bibles and almanacs, and at least half a dozen most valuable manuscript books filled with interesting records of past events and traditions. Some of all this harvest he published in his books treating of northern folk-lore, and the remainder—the ton of manuscript to which reference has been made—is still safely garnered in the stack awaiting the day of threshing and sifting.

Just prior to the outbreak of the war my father had decided to publish some of the hundreds of legends he had collected during the course of his life. Unfortunately, though he had

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been at some pains to classify these folk-tales, he had made no final selection as to which he considered the most worthy of preservation in permanent form. That has been left to me—a task by no means easy. Each story is in itself something more than a mere narrative told by old folk on a winter's night, as they sat in the ingle-neuk with the younger generation around them. Each tells us something of the mentality of successive generations ; each in its way and place fits into the mosaic work of local history—either in its earliest or more modern chapters—and most are also pregnant with local lore, and in this respect also a contribution to the history and understanding of the evolution of rural life. So in selecting and editing the posthumous collection I have been influenced by considerations, not only of the value of each story as a complete narrative, but also by the desire to include legends representative of succeeding generations and epochs. The Norsemen and the sagas of the Vikings seem to have had an undying influence upon the sturdy northern race, and to them we undoubtedly owe the earliest of our legends of hobmen, ogres, giants, sprites, and fairies. With one or two notable exceptions, however, I have passed over the traditions which sprang from this source. This course has been adopted, not because the stories lacked interest, but rather in view of the fact that variants of many of them have been included in every book on folklore and many local historical works. It has been my aim to avoid that which is hackneyed and an oft-told tale, and to include only legends which appear to me to have a distinct value to the student, and, at the same time, an appeal to the casual reader. Possibly the particular legends which I have chosen from my father's collection would not have been

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those he would have singled out. His choice would probably have been more academic and without any regard to what may be termed "the popular." I hope I have not entirely lost sight of the value of legendary lore as an index to the temper, hopes, fears, social life, and even moral outlook of country folk. All these are more or less reflected in the pages which follow. I am convinced that a study of the folk-tales of a country or district are in a measure an index to the minds of those who delighted in them. They were so deep-rooted, so bound up with the life of each district, and so potent in their influence, as to have a claim upon the respect of an age which has not only all but lost the traditional tale but the power of tale-telling by the spoken word. When one recalls that all the old legends recorded in this book were handed down orally by one generation to another, the remarkable thing is not that some of them are obviously incomplete, that here and there anachronisms and obvious interpolations occur, but that the narratives had been preserved with so many details as it was possible to collect half a century ago. To-day it would be impossible to accomplish what my father did in the days of his youth and activity. We live in a less poetic, and less imaginative, as well as a less superstitious age. Witches and wisemen, fairies and elves, hobmen and highwaymen, seers and bold, bad barons, all seem to have departed (pace Sir Conan Doyle) from this naughty and wicked world when our grandsires went hence. All these play an important part in succeeding pages.

Beyond an introduction to some of the stories, and occasional annotations which may help to illuminate the text and add additional information, I personally claim no merit for this book. My position has simply been that of

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editor. If the reception of this volume indicates sufficient interest in the subject, there is still abundant matter of similar calibre amongst the manuscripts I have inherited to fill a dozen more such books. This will provide an interesting test of public literary appetite. At any rate, it has the merit of being a departure from the beaten track and of preserving much of interest which would otherwise have irretrievably been lost. Whether generations yet to come will value these old folk-tales more than that of to-day remains to be seen.

J. Fairfax-Blakeborough.

*Grove House,
Norton-on-Tees.*





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i. The Hand of Glory: A Thrilling Legend of Stage-Coach Days

About the year 1824, and in the middle of the memorable November of that year, a snowstorm commenced, the like of which had not been experienced for many years even in those times when winters *were* winters. So terrible was its fury, and so heavy was the downfall, that many a coach was blocked. Some were stuck in drifts, some managed to reach the end of the stage and so gained a haven of rest and comfort; but between York and Piercebridge all traffic was held up, save to the venture-some on horseback. About five o'clock, on one of the worst of these nights, much behind time, the south-going mail struggled through all kinds of difficulties as far as the sign of the Oak Tree, then a well-known hostelry on the Great North Road, or rather that section of it known as Leeming Lane.

"Any chance forward?" cried the driver.

"Worse forward than the way you've come, by all account," replied mine host. So there was no alternative but to take out the horses and wait events. Even the inside passengers were nothing loth, and out and down both "in" and "out"¹ hurried through the piles of snow

¹ Inside and outside passengers.

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which had been cleared from the doorway of the Oak Tree. They found that the accommodation in the old inn was already pretty well taxed by weather-bound travellers, and were told they would have to be content with the servants' quarters. Grooms and indoor men-servants forthwith began to make arrangements for sleeping in the saddle-rooms and haylofts. Even then, a shakedown had to be hurriedly contrived upon some boards, which were supported by iron bands hanging about three feet from the kitchen rafters. Here Peggy Scott and Jenny Brown, two good-looking, buxom, serving wenches, were to pass the night. The plan they and their mistress had decided upon was that, as soon as everyone had retired to rest, the maids were to undress in the kitchen, pull the table a little forward, put a chair upon it, scramble into their improvised bed, and sleep as best they could. This having been done, the mistress removed the chair, pushed back the table, and carried their clothes into her room. In this way, they would be quite safe from detection, did anyone happen to visit the lower regions during the night. The girls quite enjoyed the fun of the thing, and, amidst much giggling, bade their mistress "Good-night," declaring they were quite comfortable, and would sleep like tops until she awakened them in the morning. They did not, however, find sleep come as readily as they imagined. They were restless, and lay for some time half asleep and half awake.

It was whilst they lay thus dozing, both at the same time became conscious of a whispered conversation directly underneath their improvised bed. Peggy, the elder of the two, wide awake in a moment, gently laid her hand

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over her companion's mouth, and, placing her lips to Jenny's ear, said under her breath: "Be still, and no one will find us up here." Then she peeped over the boards and saw that two, if not more, people were moving about either in their stocking-feet or muffled boots. Presently there came to them the sound of blowing, and a second later the embers of the wood fire burst into flame, and flickered brightly, just long enough for the blower to light his lanthorn candle without having to waste time with his tinder-box. Peggy instantly recognised the two men she caught sight of as being amongst the passengers who had come by the "Red Rover." Although they carried on their conversation in an undertone, their thievish designs and plan of operation were distinctly overheard by the trembling girls just above their heads. They learnt from their remarks that there had travelled by the same coach two horse-dealers and a Quaker, and each was known to carry a considerable sum of money. Their rooms and clothes were to be searched first, then the landlord's cashbox, which, they had gathered, he kept at the foot of his bed under the mattress, was to be abstracted last of all.

As the shaking girls listened to all this plotting there came a light tap on the window shutters. One of the "gentlemen of the road" responded in like manner, remarking: "There's Jim with the horses. It's time we got to work. All seems still. . . . What's that?" he whispered, as a noise, caused by Jenny uttering a low moan as she lost consciousness in a fainting fit, attracted their attention. This mishap almost led to the discovery of the two girls, but, as it turned out, it was the

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very best which could have happened. Jenny being a hysterical lass, there is no knowing what she might have done had not insensibility thus overtaken her. Peggy held her hand over her own throbbing heart, for fear lest their hiding should be discovered. She prayed it might not be so, for she had determined, if unmolested, to make a determined effort to save her master's property, and that of others as well.

"Only the wind—it's blowing a full gale as bad as ever outside," reassuringly replied the younger man. "Let's get to business then; but before I put the candle in the hand, we must make certain everyone is asleep."

When Peggy heard this, to her, dreadful announcement she felt like fainting herself. They were, she knew, to make use of a "Hand of Glory." Often from her grandmother had she heard of the mighty protective influence such a relic from the dead possessed in favour of those who used it. She well knew the wonderful power which it held over all those asleep under the same roof from the moment the candle held in the skeleton fingers was lighted. She had been told, and believed (as did most folk of that period), that no earthly power could awake those who slept, so long as that awful light burned. Often, too, had she heard her granny tell stories regarding the mystic potency of this same candle, made from various tallows, one of which must contain the fat from a human heart, together with other equally gruesome ingredients. She was fully aware that, when this candle was set alight, and held in the grip of that limb, torn from the body of some malefactor whilst swinging in

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gibbet chains, a trance, like unto death itself, fell upon all those who—as has been remarked—were already asleep beneath the roof under which its magic light burned. Well she knew that only blood or milk could put out its flame, and so set free the charmed sleepers.

Her plan of action was speedily decided upon. As soon as the two thieves had left the kitchen on their tour of inspection she would drop to the floor, run to the dairy for a jug of milk, and with it extinguish the flame. She said to herself: “Let me but manage that, and then I’ll let out such a skrike (scream) as will ommaist waken dead folks let alone them that are wick.” The first part of this scheme Peggy succeeded in accomplishing, but on returning from the dairy with her jug of milk, she had only just time to conceal herself behind the high settle in the ingle-nook before the two men returned. Through a crack in one of the panels in the settle she could watch everything they did.

“Now, then,” said the elder of the twain, “them what’s asleep will so remain, and them what’s awake—well! If they give us any bother they’ll get their heads cracked, or summat worse—that’s *their* lookout.” As he spoke he carefully, almost tenderly, unwrapped a small parcel, and, holding up its contents, he addressed it more than his companion: “That was poor Tom’s hand! I had a lot of bother to get it, but I managed it in the end. . . . How they watched that gibbet for some of us going for one of his hands, and how I scared them that watched that pick dark night when I said to meself ‘it’s now or never!’ . . . Him and me agreed that whoever got lung up first, the other was to have his right hand, so as,

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in a way like, we should still keep each other company in the old business. It was a friendly thought of Tom's . . . but he allus had a kindly feelin' for others, and he's never played me false with his dead bones yet." Whilst thus soliloquising, he laid the brown, dry, wrinkled hand of his old friend (who had paid the debt of his many crimes) upon the table, and then, with equal care, began to remove the wrappings from about the precious candle it was to hold. Whilst so doing, he suddenly paused and cried in a low tone, "Hist," and a moment later, "*That's* not the wind! It's *something* or *somebody* up there," pointing overhead to where Jenny lay. Peggy's heart sank within her, as she heard Jenny breathe a deep sigh. That Jenny must be discovered she felt was now beyond all doubt. Fortunately, before the younger of the two men could drag the table into position and climb upon it, Jenny realised that she was alone, that Peggy had somehow made her escape whilst she lay insensible, and that she would doubtless bring someone to her rescue. Unable to reach the suspended bed from the table, the young highwayman stood upon the chair his companion handed him, and, by the dim light of his lanthorn, saw the now terrified maiden sitting up with the clothes huddled round her and speechless with fright.

"Don't speak," he said in a kind voice, "don't make a sound, and, on my honour, no hurt shall come to you. . . . You must come down—better bring a quilt or blanket with you."

"Drop all that damned nonsense," said the older man on the floor below. "Catch hold of the wench and pull her down. . . . What's she doing up there anyhow?"

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. . I have a cure for women who spy upon me or dare to scream."

"Take no notice of him," whispered the more gallant of the two men. "Just you do as I've said, and we'll turn our backs until you're safely on the ground. . . . But *be quick, and be quiet*, or I cannot answer for my unruly friend."

When Jenny had scrambled down, shaking like a leaf in the wind, there were more reassurances from her discoverer—quite smitten by what he had seen of her bonny face—as they bound her to a chair. "You shall be set free, my dear, as soon as ever it is safe for you and for us. Now, I'll not tie this handkerchief very tight round your mouth, but it had better be there or you might do something silly and bring trouble upon yourself as well as us."

Peggy's heart began to beat more regularly—her presence was not going to be discovered. And then came the most terrible moment of all. On the settle, within a few inches of her spy-hole, lay her own and Jenny's garters, which their mistress, in gathering up their clothes, must either have forgotten or dropped. She had not noticed them till the elder of the two thieves picked them up and said to his accomplice: "Just slip that gag out of her mouth a minute, I want to ask that vench a question." This done, he said: "Are either of these pairs yours?" and holding the garters close to her face in the light of the lanthorn, awaited an answer from the trembling girl. "Yes," replied Jenny, "the plain ones are mine." "Then to whom does this pair belong?" demanded her questioner sententiously, peering

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into her face the while to see if she hesitated. "Now let's have the truth, or I'll——" "Let the lass speak," interrupted the other man, smiling kindly at the prisoner in the chair. "It's all over now!" thought Peggy; "but if they come round here and find me, I'll shriek out even if they kill me." Breathlessly she awaited Jenny's answer. Jenny, however, was equal to the occasion. Without a muscle of her face flinching she answered: "The other pair belong to my mistress." "Oh! and why did she take her garters off here?" asked her catechist, suspiciously. Again Peggy felt that discovery was at hand—that Jenny could not possibly have an answer ready to *that* question. But terror seemed to have sharpened the maiden's wits, and without hesitation she replied: "The mistress washed her feet before she went to bed and put some ointment on her chilblains. . . . She must have forgotten to take her garters upstairs with her."

"There! that will do," said the younger man, "we've wasted time enough. Let's get to business and away"; and, without more ado, he re-tied the handkerchief round Jenny's mouth, and finished the operation with a kiss upon her brow. The mysterious and trance-producing candle was lighted and fixed within the bent fingers of the withered hand of Tom the gibbeted; then both men silently left the kitchen, taking the Hand of Glory with them. Peggy, half mesmerised, half fascinated, watched them until they got to the foot of the stairs and there saw them secrete the dread hand and its burning taper in a corner cupboard, there to continue the spell which would, she knew, already hold within its grip all those

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sleep within the house. Then silently they began their ascent to the upper regions. This caution, of course, was necessary, as the hand and its light only held under its baneful influence those to whom Morpheus had reckoned prior to its being lighted.

No sooner were they beyond the first landing than Peggy left her hiding-place. Removing the gag from Jenny's mouth she hurriedly explained the situation and that there was no time to loose the ropes that bound her men. The instant, however, that Jenny heard her call out "robbers" she also was to shriek her very loudest, still then she was to remain quite silent. Hastening to the corner cupboard, Peggy did not wait to see how much milk it required to extinguish the flickering light. She straightway poured the whole of the contents of her jug over the hand and candle, the flame turned scarlet, the fingers twitched then released their hold, and the taper fell with its light out. The courageous girl now stole upstairs to her master's room and soon made him understand the danger he and the whole household had been, and still were, in. Not a moment did he lose. Thrusting his feet into his top-boots, and getting into his heavy overcoat, which had acted as an extra covering on the bed, he told the shivering Peggy to take his place beside his wife. Removing his pistol from under his pillow, he made his way on tip-toe downstairs and out of the back door to the saddle-room. Here he wakened the sleeping postboys and stablemen and told them what was on foot. Selecting three or four of the stoutest to return with him to the house to capture the two highwaymen, he bade the others secure the waiting accomplice with the

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horses at a given signal from him. To this he added: "And remember, lads, the money the horses fetch shall be divided amongst you when we've sold 'em." On reaching the house, he and his men hid behind the row of travelling coats hanging from the pegs quite near the foot of the stairs. Barely were they secreted than the man in charge of the horses spied one of the stable-hands creeping along the back of the hedge near him. Scenting danger he immediately gave the prearranged warning owl-hoot. Finding they were discovered, the yard staff of the Oak Tree closed in from every side, and, with shouts of triumph, seized their captive and led him and the three horses to the stables. The pair within the house, hearing the alarm signal, snatched up such little booty as they had collected and dashed to the stairs. The elder of the twain determined at all cost to secure his precious "Hand of Glory" before making his escape, and so soon as he opened the door of the little corner cupboard he saw that it had not really failed him, but that someone who understood its working had discovered it. There was no doubt about this, for milk still dripped from the oaken shelf to the floor, and the withered fingers had dropped as though the sinews had acted once again. Muttering a curse upon his companion's politeness and the maid's craftiness—for he imagined that it was Jenny who had been responsible for their undoing—he seized the hand and candle, and, whilst in the act of tucking both away in an inside pocket, his feet were pulled from under him. Down he came across the lower step, and, in a moment, his companion was laid across his prostrate form. In less time than it takes to tell, and before the least

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resistance could be offered, from the hanging coats came a series of "who-whoops" and "tally-ho's" as the men rushed out like a pack of hounds with hackles up, running in from scent to view to worry. This roused the whole house, and after their first fright, great was the joy of those whose property had so narrowly escaped being lost to them for ever.

A substantial sum of money was speedily collected and presented to Peggy Scott for her wit and bravery, and Jenny was not forgotten when Peggy made it known how cleverly her fellow-servant had fibbed. Peggy, by the way, was a native of Pickhill, in which district her descendants were still to be found a few years ago.

Note

A somewhat similar legend is told of The Spital Inn, Stainmoor, a posting-house on the York-Carlisle Road. A serving-maid in this case was responsible for breaking the spell of the Hand of Glory, the manipulation of which was carried out by a highwayman who had arrived at the inn disguised as an old woman. He was heard to repeat an incantation which ran :

Let those who rest more deeply sleep ;
Let those awake their vigils keep.
O Hand of Glory, shed thy light,
Direct us to our spoil to-night.
Flash out thy light, O skeleton hand,
And guide the feet of our trusty band.





ii. The Wraith of Little Smeaton

Hall

A couple of centuries ago most of the property around Little Smeaton, just off the old coaching road between Northallerton and Darlington, was owned by a family named Hewgill, whose successors were at the Hall last century and descendants of whom are yet in the neighbourhood. The Hall, a delightfully situated country mansion, has been renamed Westthorpe, and is now the residence of Captain Cooper Horsfall. Local tradition surrounds this old home of the Hewgills with a restless spirit, which, when the moon is at the full—so said old folk—returns to the scenes of the sad story now to be recorded.

The Hewgills were an old family, proud of their genealogy and connections, and taking first rank in the table of social precedence in those parts. At the period with which our narrative deals the hope of the Hewgills was centred in their one remaining unmarried child—a daughter of wonderful grace and beauty of whom great things were expected. Bella Hewgill would marry, if not a title, certainly a commoner of wealth and position, and many were the castles built in the air for her by her doting parents. Unfortunately, Miss Bella did not fall

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n with the preconceived plans so confidently arranged and frequently laid before her. She appears to have been a romantic girl of spirit, and, like many a maiden before and since, elected to shape her own destinies. Of a truth, with her, as with so many others, the course of true love did not run smooth.

It came as a shock to her parents when first it was whispered that their daughter was indulging in clandestine meetings with a young spark in the neighbourhood. Although admittedly well-connected, a good enough horseman, and a handsome and cultured youth, he, for some reason, had not the *entrée* to the Hewgill social circle. He was a younger son and known to have no money and no expectations; so, rightly or wrongly, he was considered an entirely undesirable suitor for the beautiful Bella.

Both parents strove to convince their daughter that nothing but evil and ignominy would follow in the train of such a *mésalliance*. They reasoned, they begged, and then threatened, but it was all of no avail. Bella simply shook her head with all the traditional spirit of the Hewgill family. She argued that they, her parents, had chosen whom *they* would marry, and that she should be given the same freedom.

Then was it her father and mother began a system of espionage, but scheme as they would, the lovers contrived to meet, and they knew it.

At last, owing to hints which came from the kitchen that Miss Bella intended eloping and marrying in spite of them, Squire Hewgill determined upon a plan to bring his self-willed daughter to her senses. Drastic circum-

Wraith of Little Smeaton Hall

stances, he contended, justified drastic measures; and he had his wayward daughter locked up in a small room at the very top of the old house, from which escape was impossible.

Still Bella remained as defiant as ever. "They might break her heart, but never her will," she said. Her father thought otherwise; but as the days passed by and no sign of relenting was seen in the prisoner, he grew weary of the constant vigil necessary to frustrate the attempts at rescue by her lover. So was it he decided to consult old "Mother Webster" at Hornby—a wrinkled old dame at that time held in great repute, not only as a healer of divers complaints which baffled the skill of the most learned leeches, but also considered a past-mistress in the black arts of necromancy.

"Aye," they said, "there's many a queer thing happens underneath au'd Nanny Webster's thack (thatch)." Indeed, it was commonly thought that his Satanic Majesty himself on special occasions guarded her door, as well as being a constant ally.

To Mother Webster then, Squire Hewgill went, laying his case before her and begging her to supply him with some anti-love philtre which would turn his daughter's affection into hate and bring her to reason, which meant, of course, to his way of thinking.

Mother Webster assured him that she neither possessed nor knew either of herbs or nostrums potent enough to brew such antidotal philtre as he desired. She told him, however, that there *was* a way by which he might succeed in the object of his visit. The old dame was at some pains to caution the Squire that in the process and mystery

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attendant upon the working of the charm he ran a grave risk of terrible evil rebounding upon his own shoulders. There were also considerable difficulties to overcome ere the full ritual was accomplished, but if he once began to work the charm he must continue to the bitter end and whatever the consequences to himself or others. There must be no turning back or the most fearful punishment would rest upon himself and his whole household—a Nemesis of which successive generations of his line through all time would be periodically reminded.

Mother Webster concluded her warning—a most serious and emphatic warning—by strongly advising Squire Hewgill to allow his daughter to wed the man of her own choice. “The lass has to live her own life,” said the wrinkled seer, adding “and she had better do so in a humble way with a man she loves and one who loves her, than with someone with wealth who will mebbe give her title and position and yet care nothing at all about the beautiful flower after he has worn it for a day or two.”

But Squire Hewgill was adamant. He would pay no heed to any such advice. He was quite relentless, though recognising that the determined spirit which his daughter displayed was inherited from himself. So he bade the Hornby charlatan hold her peace and tell him what course he had to adopt so that his daughter’s heart might be turned against her lover. “I’ll take all the risks,” he added, impatiently.

Again Mother Webster cautioned him how serious a thing it was to pit himself against Cupid and Venus, and to call—as he would have to call—upon St Agnes, the very patron saint of maidenhood, to aid him. The

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Squire now lost all patience and bade her cease her old wives' tales to frighten him and tell him at once what action he was to take. He added that he would be careful to carry out her minutest instructions, and concluded :

"I would rather carry my daughter's body out of the Hall a corpse than that she should ever enter it as the wife of such a man as that she wishes to wed."

To these unnatural sentiments Dame Webster gave utterance to an axiom she was again to repeat on a more awesome occasion :

"It is at all times easier to drop words than it is to pick them up again."

Seeing nothing would dissuade her visitor from his purpose, Mother Webster told him that he must sweep three local bridges with a bristed broom (see note, p. 35) always sweeping away from him. His task had to commence on the stroke of midnight and be repeated on three successive nights immediately preceding the full moon. Having completed this part of the ritual, he must stand facing the moon on each bridge and formally give to them names. Standing in the middle of the bridges, he was to sprinkle a few drops of holy water, and whilst so doing pronounce the name. The first bridge was to be named Thorstant; the titles of the other two have been forgotten. This done he had to call upon St Agnes in these terms :

"Sweet Agnes, the bridge is now clean swept, and Thorstant begs of you to take this way."

The same rite had to be observed the following two nights, each time appealing to Sweet Agnes, in the name

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of each particular bridge, to cross over. On the fourth night—that of the full moon—he had to stand on the first bridge he had swept, facing the moon, and say: “Good Thorstant sends you this,” throwing at the moon a fresh-laid egg, immediately turning about so as not to see where it fell. Hastening on, the same ceremony was repeated, the only difference being that St Agnes received her invitation in the name to which each water-crossing had, at any rate temporarily, been dedicated. The charm was not, however, completed, for on the succeeding three nights there were other ceremonies to be observed which are not remembered in detail. The crowning point was reached on the fateful third night. The Squire’s instructions were that when he reached the third bridge—that nearest the Hall—he was to hasten home with all possible speed, insomuch as here failure might overtake him and a relentless Nemesis await him. Though all had gone well up to this juncture of the working of the spell, its success and the future peace and happiness of the Squire hung on a slender thread. He had called upon the saints and mythological gods to come to his aid, he had set in motion the machinery of charity (maybe the Devil himself) to achieve his ends, and here he would have revealed to him whether they were in sympathy with his project or whether their curse was to rest upon him and his. Old Mother Webster’s injunction was couched in these words:

“And when you have come to the third and last of the bridges on the final night you must hurry home as fast as ever your legs will carry you . . . for if so be as between the end of the brig and your own doorstep a weasel cross

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your path and your eyes light upon it, evil will follow you all the remaining days of your life, so that, sleeping or waking, in sunshine and darkness, in fair weather and storm, your eyes will see, your ears will hear, and your mind will picture things which are not of this world, but which will make living a burden, death fearsome, and every minute of every hour of every day a horror and a nightmare."

When Squire Hewgill heard all this most solemn threat he merely smiled. In his own mind he saw a way of evading the ill omen. Did he not know every step of the road between the bridge foot and his home so thoroughly that he need have no qualms as to his ability to walk the whole distance with his eyes closed? . . . This he decided would be the course he would adopt.

When he reached home from Mother Webster's he was staggered to find that his wife, who had throughout been in sympathy with him, had entirely changed her attitude. She begged the Squire to relent and give his consent to the union of the two lovers. This change of front was not entirely due to a mother's innate love, nor was it because of unseen influences which had whispered to her during her husband's absence. The primary *raison d'être* was she had discovered, scratched upon a pane of glass fitted into the lead lattice at the top of her daughter's prison door, the following lines :—

La Bella pouts her corril ¹ lips,
All lovely, loving thing,
How couldst thou set thy rebel heart
So much on a strange king ?

¹ Coral.

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With him to sit, with him to chat,
Ye morn went blithe away,
And gay assemblys, routs and balls,
Closed every joyous day.
But oh how fleeting are our joys,
How sudden comes our sorrow ;
In pleasure, who is lost to-day,
Is lost in grief to-morrow.

Neither his daughter's lines nor his wife's pleadings could soften the Squire's stern resolve, come what may, to achieve his own selfish ends. To his wife he said : " If Bella will give me the word of a Hewgill never to speak to this fellow again, all well ; she may return amongst us. If not . . . then I will keep her where she is till she dies." Hardly had he spoken these words than he stood momentarily transfixed and dumbstruck, for, from somewhere, there came into his ear a warning whisper—as clear and distinct as from a human voice :

" It is at all times easier to drop words than it is to pick them up again."

Without saying a word to anyone Squire Hewgill set about his task. There were difficulties many, but he overcame them all, even to the very moment when, with closed eyes, he turned from the foot of the final bridge on his homeward journey. Up to that instant he had been successful beyond his most sanguine dreams. The face of the moon had never once been darkened by the smallest cloud whilst performing any part of his task ; no raven or rook had presaged ill omen ; no owl had scouted as he swept the bridges. . . . He was safe and successful ! His daughter would become as potter's

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clay in his hand. With his mind at ease, he tightly closed his eyes and started on his homeward journey. He had traversed more than half the distance without mishap when a rush of icy cold air struck his face—so sudden, so deadly cold, so like the clammy hand of death itself, that he started back, involuntarily opening his eyes as he did so. At that instant there crossed the road at his very feet a weasel! . . . Rooted to the spot he stood dumb, terrified, limp, helpless, yet fascinated. A cold shiver shook every bone in his body. His lips were dry and parched, and a cold, damp sweat stood on his brow. His eyes followed the sinuous movements of that small, brown, treacherous animal—to him the embodiment of all that was evil—till, snake-like, it had disappeared into the opposite hedgerow. Gone! But what had it left behind? Not a pad-mark, not a bent or broken blade of grass, nothing to show from whence it had come or whither it had gone. Nothing except the damning and overwhelming knowledge that it had been, and the conscious certainty of untold evil which must follow and remain—sleeping and waking, every minute of every hour of every day! Even as these disturbing and fearful thoughts sank like iron deep into the Squire's very soul, there came upon the still night air a long, low wail of agony and grief, so wild, so weird, so piercing, that his heart stood still. And this was not all. A new terror arrayed itself against him. The heavy mist began to roll and gather itself together in fantastic shapes. The white pall, which until then had lain asleep on all the land, now touched with magic breath, took human form. A figure in the semblance of a lovely maiden came gliding

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towards him with arm, and hand, and finger outstretched. . . It was the wraith of his own child, pale as death, yet true to life, before him. For a moment she gazed upon him with indescribable look—the dead, the living; parent, child—and then the misty figure grew fainter, dissolving and unfolding until once again it was lost in the vast damp shroud which enveloped field and hedge alike.

The Squire knew the worst had happened; and, when too late, he cursed his cruel folly and knew that a relentless Nemesis was to dog the steps of a stony and vindictive parent. When he reached home he found the house in darkness. All were in bed and asleep, and one, he knew, would never wake again. With faltering steps he sought his child's prison. All he saw there no one knew. They only learned that Bella was dead. How she had ended her last days remained locked in the breast of the self-filled and now broken-hearted parent.

If the following part of the story be true, no doubt can exist that for long Hewgill lost his reason. The daughter, he felt, had disgraced the family as he had disgraced the name of father. She had died by her own hand; hence he could not be buried in consecrated ground. Nevertheless he would not hear of the observance of the usual custom of the body of one who had committed self-murder being buried at four cross-roads with a stake through the chest. So, by his commands, the last mortal remains of poor Bella were lowered into a well which was afterwards filled with stones.

To Mother Webster he then went, and, half-demented, he cursed her again and again to her face. She retaliated by shouting after him as he departed :

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Though thoo's cassen her body in a well,
There's nowt can ho'd her doon ;
Her spirit yet with ye shall dwell
Three days afore each moon.

Her words were soon proved to be no idle prophecy, for at regular intervals Bella's restless astral returned to the terror of all Squire Hewgill's household and neighbours. On more than one occasion when her lover was driving home late at night she joined him ; and on one memorable occasion in the presence of several people of good repute, just as a farmer was leaving the Hall stackyard with a load of grain, Bella was observed seated on the topmost sack until the lead horse planted a foot on Appleton-le-Wisk Bridge. At that point the spectre disappeared. Again, a Mrs Wrightson, when one of a house-party at the Hall, occupied what had been Bella's bedroom ; she was greatly surprised one evening when retiring to see a strange young lady (she had never seen Bella) sitting by her bedside reading a letter. As Mrs Wrightson entered the young lady stood up, hid the letter in her bodice, and slowly walked out of the room. Later in the evening everyone in the house was aroused by agonised wails which brought the guests from their beds. . . . The moon had once more called Bella from the other side of that thin veil which hides the dead from the living. At last the Hewgills sought advice as to how they could have their house exorcised. No servant would stay with them, and they themselves waited with disturbed mind and unclosed eyes the coming of each moon. They were told that the only way they could escape from the nocturnal visits of her whom they had so much wronged was to

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leave their home and build another house over running water. On completion a maiden was to be carried feet first into the new home by the back door and out at the front entrance. The journey through the house was to be made in a straight line. So was it that Hornby Grange was built and the aforementioned course adopted. Near as was their new home to the Hall, no more were the Hewgills troubled by the spirit of Bella after this.

Notes

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Bristed broom : meaning unknown. Possibly a corruption of the word "bustard," applied to witches who had lost power to work evil. An attempt at explanation will be found in *Yorkshire Wit, Character, and Folklore*, pp. 163-164.

The pane of glass bearing the rhyme quoted in text is still in the possession of the Horsfall family at Westthorpe, Smeaton, Northallerton.





iii. *The Mystery of Anngrove Hall*

Not a stone is left to mark the site where once stood Anngrove Hall—some little distance off the Stokesley and Great Ayton highroad. Yet till late in the seventeenth century it was one of the most picturesque country houses in Cleveland. So late as 1823, Baines, in his *North Riding Directory*, describes the old mansion as “The Manor House,” though, according to tradition, it had long been doomed by an irrevocable curse. “The Mystery of Anngrove Hall” as now given is from three sources, each supplying something omitted by the others, but agreeing in most other essential details.

To begin, one of the occupants of Anngrove, whether owner or tenant is matterless, had a serious grievance against his under-coachman, Henry Edwards. Some state he had good reason for believing that one of his daughters and Edwards were carrying on an intrigue. Whatever the cause of the disagreement might be, the young fellow was “given notice.”

The story goes that late one evening shortly after matters had come to a crisis, the master inquired of the butler if Edwards had returned from Stokesley, whither, he said, he had sent him with a box of valuable plate and

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jewellery, to give to the custody of a gentleman who was going to London by the coach. On hearing that Edwards had not yet arrived back at the Hall, the butler was instructed to send him to his master the moment he returned.

When it was nearly half-past one, and still no Edwards, the Squire of Anngrove grew greatly excited, declaring the fellow was a thief, and that he had taken off to London with the box himself. Ordering his chaise to come round at once, he swore he would follow the scoundrel to the world's end. Snatching a hasty meal, he packed a few necessary things, jumped into the chaise and was driven direct to Thirsk.

He spent the forenoon making inquiries, getting bills printed offering a reward of £200 for the apprehension of Edwards and a full description of the missing articles. These he distributed amongst the coach guards and carriers going to all parts of the kingdom, asking them to leave them at the various houses of call at which they stopped. And then with the night mail he left for London.

But the servant was not caught, neither could any trace of him or the stolen articles ever be obtained.

Everyone was greatly shocked, when they learnt that Edwards had betrayed his trust. There seems to have been no secrecy about his love for the daughter, or that the young lady favoured his suit. At the outset it was generally supposed that he had been tempted to steal his master's property so that he might obtain funds sufficient to enable them to elope, believing if they were once man and wife, to save scandal, the father would overlook the theft; but, unfortunately, for the success of his plan, the discovery had been made just in the nick

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of time, thus supplying the irate parent with the means of keeping them for ever apart. So decided the gossips.

Weeks grew into months, and still Edwards was at large, and the Master of Anngrove remained in town. Then the gossips were treated to a new sensation. Edwards had a sister Polly living as serving-maid at The Grange, a house less than half a mile from Anngrove.

This girl left Stokesley rather late one evening, returning to the Grange by the river-side footpath. Her fellow-servant was sitting in the kitchen when Polly entered as white as a ghost, staggered to a chair, and then went into a dead faint. When she recovered consciousness she was seized with a violent fit of hysterics, which left her so weak and helpless that it was towards noon the following day before she was able to give anything like a coherent explanation as to the cause of her fright. She then told the following story. She declared that on nearing the Grange she had seen the figure of a man leaning against the last stile, and when within a few feet of him he had turned his face towards her, so that she at once recognised her brother. He bowed his head, pointing to the back of it, and she then saw that his skull was broken and a portion of the brain protruding. He never spoke, he just stood quite still, and then vanished all in a second. From what she had seen she was quite convinced that her brother was not a thief, and that he had been murdered.

Gossips now became divided in their opinion. Without the least evidence to support their theory, one set held the belief that he had been murdered by a companion in the crime, so that he might claim the whole of the stolen

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property, whilst others were equally certain that his sister had invented the story, hoping in that way to sway public feeling.

No matter what gossips might say or believe, the sister had not the least doubt that her brother was innocent of all wrong-doing, and that he had been murdered.

It was not, however, until nearly a fortnight after Edwards appeared to his sister that he showed himself to a second person. This was the miller, a staid, middle-aged man, who was grinding late owing to a scarcity of water. Turning towards the door, he saw Edwards standing near to a sack barrow. On this occasion the spectre smiled at the miller, shook his head, and then walked away, but when he (the miller) had sufficiently recovered from his surprise to run to the door the apparition was nowhere to be seen. The miller was convinced that Edwards was innocent of all wrong-doing by the way he smiled, but he had observed no wound.

Excitement was now at a high pitch. The miller was a plain man, telling a plain story. Save that he had seen the spirit of the missing man his story was lacking of all the awesome embroidery usually attending such occurrences. Public opinion, ever like a weathercock, now veered round; everyone was certain that Edwards was dead.

They might hold different views as to his actions when alive, and as to how he had come by his death, but that he was dead they one and all now agreed, and never afterwards did they alter their opinion.

Following the miller's story, was one told by Thomas Mease, one of the grooms from the Manor House. He

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was determined to give his place in the moment his master returned from London, which he heard would be in a few days' time. He had no fault to find with either master or mistress, or anything else at Anngrove, except the disturbing influence of continually seeing Edwards hanging about the place. He was not the only one amongst the servants who had made up their minds to leave. Sensation now succeeded sensation. Within a few days of Mease first telling his story and announcing his determination to be clear of Anngrove as soon as possible, a very curious thing happened in connection with the return home of his master.

His own post-chaise met him at Thirsk, and all went well until they came to the bridge (some say the gateway) within the grounds leading to the house.

In the one case, legend says that the horses refused to leave the turnpike, another version has it, that they passed through the gates, but would not cross the bridge. Whichever is correct will never be known, neither does it signify, because exactly the same thing happened. The master sprang to the ground to discover what was wrong, but the moment he was clear of the chaise the horses sprang into a furious gallop, and never stopped until they were in the stable yard. Added to this curious incident, was the fact that as the master entered the Hall, a huge picture fell with a crash to the ground, and that very night, just after the servants had retired to rest, the delf rack in the kitchen was bodily torn from the wall, and it and its contents hurled to the floor with a fearful clatter.

Two days after these happenings, Polly begged of the

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coachman to give her a shoe which had been worn by a mare called Nancy—one of the pair driven on the occasion of the Squire's inauspicious homecoming. This mare had been a special favourite of her brother's. She made no secret of what she intended doing with it; she told the coachman that she knew her brother had been murdered, and that she had been to Hannah Waugh, of Broughton, and that Hannah had bade her beg a shoe, worn by one of the horses which had refused to drag the master across water. Hannah was accounted a witch, and had promised Polly that she and the blacksmith of Broughton would "charm it," so that Polly would be able to detect the murderer of her brother. In the end the coachman gave her a fore-foot shoe of the mare Nancy, which was duly handed to Hannah.

A few days afterwards it was returned to Polly, after having been subjected to certain rites and ceremonies at the smithy. Polly carried the shoe to the Grange, intending to take it with her to Stokesley the first time she went, being quite certain that mine host of the Black Swan would hang it up in some conspicuous place; and as that was the main posting-house it was possible that her brother's murderer might there gaze upon it, and by word or sign thereupon betray his guilt. However, for the time being Polly nailed it up in the Grange. Whether she had permission to do so is of small moment. One thing is certain, it was there on the evening when a card-party was given at the Grange, and amongst the invited guests was the Master of Anngrove. It so happened that the corner in which Polly had hung the charmed shoe had to be passed by the guests in going from the

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dining- to the card-room. The shoe, though hidden from view by a cape belonging to one of the guests, was nevertheless potent, for when the Master of Anngrove passed from one room to the other it was observed that he suddenly turned ghastly pale, gasped for breath, clasped his forehead in his hand, and staggered as if he would fall at every step towards the card-room. Sinking into the nearest chair, helpless, and with a scared look upon his face, he appeared, as one of the guests remarked, "As if he had seen a ghost." Presently pleading a sudden attack of illness he ordered his carriage; but before he was seated, both he and those who were with him heard a mysterious voice from out of the darkness call "*Who murdered Edwards?*"

Late that night, to allay the fear amongst the women-folk at the Grange, Polly confessed to her mistress that it was she who had called out of the darkness to the Master of Anngrove, at the same time giving her mistress a full account of the shoe and its power. She concluded by saying that she now felt certain the Master of Anngrove was the murderer of her brother!

Such a fearful accusation might not be uttered with impunity, so Polly was cautioned to be mindful of her tongue.

But somehow her suspicion got whispered abroad, and was believed in at first by a few; but a report of such a character, like a snowball rolling down hill, grew larger as it rushed along. Round every fireside, and in every company of two or three, and in every inn for miles round, the mystery was discussed with renewed interest.

It was known that every servant had given in their

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notice, they had every one become so terrified that they refused to stay at Anngrove a day longer than their term. In fact, some had already left, too ill to attend to their duties, and others who were engaged to fill the vacancies left after their first night. Then the Hall was closed, and in the end changed hands, and the Master of Anngrove departed no one knew whither.

The tenancy of the new comer was of very short duration. But little is known of what happened during his brief sojourn.

Then the place was permanently closed. It is at this point that we are confronted with two different versions, both claiming to be correct. One party dating the discovery of Edwards's body as taking place directly after the departure of the last-mentioned tenant; whilst others declare that the Hall was closed for nearly a year, and then a branch of the rightful owners took up their quarters at the Manor House, and as nothing happened to disturb their peace, the mystery began to be spoken of less and less until in the end it was only the older people who retained any remembrance of those stirring events which had caused so much excitement when they were young. But time with its ever-changing wheel of fate, so ordered things, that after the lapse of nearly a hundred years, a descendant of the man who had once been accused of murdering his under-coachman, took Anngrove on a lease.

No sooner was he comfortably settled than the ghost of Edwards began to haunt the Hall so persistently that all the old stories of a past generation were recalled and retold to ready and eager listeners.

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To decide which of these versions is the correct one is not an easy matter, and the reader must be allowed to make his choice.

One tradition says that following upon a dream his sister had, Edwards's body was discovered. Another tells us that some men digging for a lost ferret in the stackyard of the Manor House were responsible for finding his grave. Certainly the livery, buttons from his coat, and other articles proved its identity, and besides the skull was fractured just as Polly had declared, which clearly pointed to foul play.

Considerable cunning had been displayed by the murderer in the disposal of the body. When the dead man was laid in the ground it was hay-time, and most probably Edwards had been buried under the thorns upon which a stack was to be made. His grave had been speedily dug, for the remains were quite near to the surface. It will be remembered that for long after his disappearance, owing to the report which the Master of Anngrove so cunningly circulated of theft, no one imagined foul play, and hence no movement was set on foot to search for the body; it was a live man, not a dead one, those who hoped to gain the reward were looking for.

The precise date is not known; suffice it, there came a time when the house fell into such ill-repute that no one could be prevailed upon to live in it, so it was closed and never inhabited again; thus fulfilling the prophecy which Hannah Waugh is reported to have made to the Master of Anngrove one day when she met him in Stokesley town just before his disappearance. Said she,

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the hearing of several market folk, brandishing her
aff in his face :

You'll have your day,
But lambs will play
And skip where Anngrove stands.
No lime shall ho'd
Its stones ; no sod
Shall hap up t' deeds of thy two hands.





iv. Abbas: The Cross-Roads Spectre

Between the years 1787-1800 Robert Jackson and two companions were returning from Boroughbridge to Norton-le-Clay. It was just turned midnight when they drew near to the cross-roads between Dishforth and Norton. They had been to Boroughbridge races and were loudly discussing the day's sport, but when near to the turn for home, they all three beheld in the very centre of the cross-roads a form which they immediately recognised as the spirit of Abbas standing by his milk-white steed. Little, indeed, the folk of those days knew about Abbas, save that when he showed himself it was to give warning that a calamity was about to visit the district.

For a few moments the spectre remained motionless, then pointing to the ground with his sword, he shook his head obviously in negation, mounted his steed, and rode swiftly away along the Dishforth Road. Barely was he out of sight when they saw a fowmart dragging a dead rabbit towards the spot on which Abbas had stood, but when within a few feet there came an arrow from an unseen but unerring bow which pierced it to the heart. Immediately afterwards there sounded overhead such a chattering and such devilish laughter that Jackson and his two companions stood rooted to the spot terrified.

Abbas : The Cross-Roads Spectre

he moon, though not at the full, lighted the heavens sufficiently for them to see directly above three night-hags stride of their besom steeds darting hither and thither and filling the air with hideous discordant chucklings and demoniacal yells. Eventually they sailed down, alighting on the very spot Abbas had just left. The trio, still transfixed, then witnessed certain rites regarding which they dare not speak, even amongst themselves, afterwards. Just before the three hags departed they stood their three brooms tripod fashion round the dead humart and rabbit, and taking hold of hands formed a circle. Dancing round their erstwhile steeds they sang the following lines, which are known to have been employed by other witches on similar occasions :—

With many a gambol we come—
One come, two come, three come.
By magic art we ride the air—
Aye ! underground or anywhere,
Then off we gan.
We bid you hence, but mark you well,
Nought say, nought hint, nought may ye tell,
Aught that we've said, aught that we've done ;
Of sacred rite, or madcap fun,
Or else our curse will find ye.
Tell what you've seen—we'll blind ye ;
Tell what you've heard—we'll deave ¹ ye ;
And now we're bound to leave ye.
Now when you waken none will know
That we : as one, as two, as three
Danced at t' cross-roads this night.

¹ Deafen.

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When the trio awoke later that morning it was as from a trance. They were so confused that until they had compared notes they could not piece the weird scenes of the previous evening together or decide whether it was only a dream. They had no clear recollection as to how they had got home from the fateful cross-roads, but were eventually unanimous as to what had occurred there up to the time of the departure of the three night-hags. Clearly did it stand out in their memory that it was forbidden under dire penalties that they should speak of the mysterious trio, though there had been no such injunction to secrecy regarding the appearance and dramatic actions of Abbas or the tragedy of the rabbit and the fougart. So was it that the whole countryside was soon discussing the report that Abbas had once more shown himself at the haunted cross-roads, and that, therefore, some dire disaster was about to take place amongst them. The incident of the fougart and the rabbit, however, was something new in the periodical appearances of Abbas and his white horse—a mystery which was beyond their reasoning powers.

By a process of deduction peculiar to those days, they came to the conclusion that the local witch must have a hand in the disturbing business, and that she had once more merited the usual punishment of ducking. The witch, in the person of Liza Horngill, was at hand—a toothless old body, turned eighty, who lived in a little thatched cottage on the outskirts of Dishforth. Few passed her door without “spitting for luck,” or crossing themselves, especially if Liza had been seen catching hag-worms on Hutton or Marton Moors. She was

Abbas: The Cross-Roads Spectre

known to have a bottle filled with "toad venom." Thrice she was caught by one farmer gathering goose dung on his stubble. She persisted that she required it as an antidote for her aches, but everyone believed that she burned it at midnight, together with the moss she had scraped from certain graves, to aid her in her machinations. These, however, were old charges; though she was at once decided "she's been at work again or Abbas wouldn't have shown himself." So, muttering and protesting, the wrinkled, forbidding, old dame was half-dragged, half-carried from her cot and duly ducked in the pond. When the crowd had wreaked what they considered their vengeance, they left Liza to crawl out of the mud and slime at the edge of the pond as best she could. Though well-nigh exhausted, she called as she reached the place where the cattle walked in to drink: "Wait a minute while I deggle (sprinkle) some of you"; and, without further words, she threw over her left shoulder such water as she could gather in the palms of her hands. Some of the filth and water fell upon the face of the leader of the ducking party, one Owen Metcalfe, who, looking at the mutterable things, straightway pushed old Liza backwards into the pond again to the amusement of all beholders. Then, for the second time, she crawled out on her hands and knees, she put an end to all laughter by pointing a skeleton-like finger at those who watched her, and saying:

When the fire draws these damp clothes
And its reek (smoke) gans upward;
So will the luck and life of one leave him.
There's others, too, will rue this day—
They've turned their luck, mark what I say.

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No sooner had these prophetic words fallen upon their ears almost as a curse, than it was felt that a grave error had been made, and that before taking any such steps they should have consulted the local wiseman. It was agreed that the best remaining course was to approach him now with a view to hearing his views as to reparation, and to obtain an elucidation of the mysteries which were so exercising their minds. As Robert Jackson and his two friends were the ones who could tell what was termed "a straight tale" regarding the apparitions and omens, and, as they were the custodians of secrets they might not reveal, it was they who were considered to have almost a moral obligation resting upon them to visit the wiseman—a past-master in the use of crystals and other strange aids to charlatanry. So the trio were at last persuaded to set out on a journey which was not much to their liking, though they were only too anxious to circumvent, if possible, the threats of Liza and the evil which so often befell those who aforetime had seen the spirit of Abbas and his white horse at the cross-roads.

There was quite a crowd waiting their return to the Black Swan at Dishforth, and the message the deputation brought back was in no way reassuring. They were told that a serious miscarriage of community law had been committed by the ducking of the witch. That she had no lot or part in the appearance of Abbas, and that those who had had a hand in the maltreatment of Liza had undoubtedly placed themselves in her power. Immediately each began to excuse himself, and to urge that they were merely spectators and not actors in the scene by the pond. It was generally agreed that one, Owen

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etcalfe, had been a primary mover in the affair, and at, as it was he who had pushed the witch into the and after she had been ducked, he should represent the mole of them and carry their apologies to the old me. Owen emphatically refused to go alone; so eventually six of those who had assisted in the dragging Liza from her cot, were persuaded to accompany him express contrition and ask for pardon. Liza admitted em, told them she knew they would be coming, listened ietly to all their excuses and pleas for forgiveness, and en bid her raven cease croaking, and her black cat take place under the settle. Thus she spake :

“ A poor tale ! . . . all lees . . . get away yam, all you . . . but before you gan you might as well know at there's two of you marked for sorrow, and one was rinkled with the water for the dead. . . . It's all of ur own makking ! ”

Then, drawing an old brown cape around her and elling the hood over her head, she turned to the fire, read her wrinkled hands to the blaze, and began to one some rhythmical lines in her cracked voice. This rgon was preserved years ago as handed down orally rough the centuries. It may be that the spelling is onetic, that there has been corruption, and that the vision of the words is inaccurate . . . at any rate they nvey nothing to us in these days, whatever their original port may have been. Gently rocking herself from side side, with the black cat back on her knee and the raven oaking a weird, low accompaniment, the dirge sank ep into the hearts of those who heard it and filled em with fear. . This is what they heard :

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O sinig, mah sinig, tig valda mah sinig,
Dag flammer o'rog, At sulda Thorgolda.
Vester pester mah dag.

When they were well away from the house, Metcalfe inquired if they thought that he was one who was marked out for sorrow.

"Why," answered several of them together, "thoo *did* shove her backwards ower into the pond."

"Then who's the other?" he asked; but this none of them could say. So that the five were left in fear. Owen Metcalfe soon learnt what his sorrow was. He had a sweetheart, and one of the loveliest and purest of maidens was Alice Appleton, but when she heard of Owen's cruelty at the pond side she felt that she could never mate with such a man. She met him almost immediately after his visit to Liza Horngill, and she told him their courtship must end then, and for ever. He pleaded, he begged of her to forgive him, he vowed he was truly penitent, but it was useless; she repeated it could never be; he had shown his true character, she would not even shake hands with him, and left him with the shadow of the devil spreading o'er his face.

Throughout the whole district folk moved about subdued in speech and manner; the very air seemed charged with doubt and fear—the untellable fear of some dread thing happening. Many heard overhead the wild howl of Gabriel's ratchets, filling the air with their savage barking as they passed over the village. Death, they knew, had come to some one. They were not kept long in suspense; for the following morning, just three

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ys after the visit of the deputed six to the witch, all ose in the immediate neighbourhood were sorely ouble. A report spread like wildfire that Alice ppleton—"Bonny Alice," as they loved to call her—s missing. The story which her distracted mother ve was very brief, but the hearing of it filled everyone th fear. The mother said that not feeling well, she d gone to bed shortly after five o'clock, leaving the or on the latch, as Alice was spending the day with a end; but when she arose, not finding her daughter ir, she went to her room and discovered that her bed d not been slept in. The friend Alice had visited clared "that she left her a little before eight o'clock great trouble about having to break her engagement th Owen Metcalfe."

The villagers at once formed themselves into search rties, and it was not long ere her lifeless body was found the very pond in which the witch had been ducked.

Everything pointed to the fact that she had taken her oken engagement so much to heart that she had taken r own life. In whispers the good folk spoke, sadly aking their heads, for well they knew that her body would t be received within consecrated ground. At the four oss-roads, where Abbas had stood and pointed with his ord, she would have to be buried, with a stake driven rough her breast. Then first one and then another gan to say this was the calamity which the appearance Abbas foreshadowed, and the three witnesses had to tell d retell their story again and again: Abbas pointed to e ground, and shook his head, obviously signifying No." What did *that* mean? Also, what were they to

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understand by the founmart and rabbit ? Some there were who asked no question, they saw plainly this was retribution ; nay, revenge, the work of the old witch to punish Owen.

When Jackson and his companions (who had again visited the wiseman) were questioned, they unanimously declared their belief to be " that Alice Appleton had not committed suicide, that she had been shown to them as the rabbit which had been killed by the stoat before it was brought to the cross-roads." They did not venture even to hint who it was they thought that stoat might be. This theory of the rabbit, representing Alice, was adopted by many.

At last the strain became so great that a number of them decided to go boldly to the witch and ask her if she could throw any light on the mystery. . . . And they went. They told Liza that they wanted her help on behalf of " Bonny Alice," who had always been kind to her. Would she tell them if Alice *had* taken her own life ? The witch answered them that she knew at all times who to help and whom to chastise, concluding her remarks by saying :

" The stake that's been sharpened to bruise the breast of Alice will never be thrust into it, nothing will scar her snow-white bosom. Now go your ways to Owen Metcalfe and tell him by one's, and two's, and three's, that he dare not toss Alice's breast-stake up thrice and catch it thrice. Bear in mind that the founmart died soon after the rabbit. . . . Now don't forget to dare him to toss the stake, until out of fair shame he does it. Aye once for pushing me, once for pushing her, and once for

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his own ill-luck, but you needn't name that to him. . . .
must egg him on till he tosses it and then wait ? ”

Liza's challenge was soon in the mouth of everyone, and the question was squarely put to Owen: “ Dare he toss the stake ? ”

He saw that unless he did so he would lay himself open to even graver suspicion. So he said: “ Bring the stake, I'll toss it as much and as often as you like, and catch it as well.”

Though he spoke carelessly enough, those standing by saw that he was nervous and looked pale as he received the stake from him who brought it; but he nonchalantly threw it up and caught it. “ There,” said he, “ will that do for you ? There's been a vast of noise about it.”

“ That's only once ! and the old lass said thrice ; you'll be forced to throw it up other twice,” urged more than one of the bystanders.

“ All right,” said Owen, “ give me hold again ” ; and twice again he lightly threw it heavenward and caught it. “ Now will that satisfy you ? ” demanded he, as he cast upon the ground the already sharpened stake, which was intended to pierce the heart of the maiden whom in life he had so madly loved. There were many who were greatly disappointed at such an apparently tame ending to the test. . . . They had felt convinced that the witch had prepared this ordeal intending in some way at once to wreak her vengeance upon him and expose him. Yet he had, so far as could be seen, accepted the challenge and proved victorious. . . . Though they looked at each other and muttered “ nowt's happened,” something in

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reality *had* happened. In catching the stake on the third and last occasion a splinter had pierced the skin just between the thumb and finger of Owen's hand. Those who knew of this did not connect it with retribution, ill-omen, or conviction, but in an hour's time Metcalfe was groaning in agony, with an arm swollen as thick as a horse's leg.

A mounted messenger was sent to Boroughbridge for a doctor, who strove to "cup" his patient, but hardly any blood would flow, and what did stank almost beyond endurance. For three hours the leech tried all the tricks of his art, and then he told his patient that he could do no more. He must make his peace with his Creator. By this time Owen's limbs were stiff, cold, and almost paralysed, his face was turning black, and all those who saw him felt his end was near.

"Fetch Liza!" he shrieked, mad with pain and dazed with fear. She was sent for, and hastened to his bedside. The moment he saw her he wildly besought her to save him.

"Nay, nay!" said she, "I can't save tha, thoo must try and clear thi soul thiself, if thoo has one. Own up, man, own up, don't let death snatch thi soul away without making amends."

"I have nothing to own up!" he shouted, defiantly, with all the strength he could muster.

"Let him alone! let him alone! This night his soul, burdened with its guilt, will go with Alice's corpse when you take it to the cross-roads; but, mind you, *he* it was who drowned her; *he* it was who shoved her in as he did me; and *he* it was who received the baptism for the dead

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from my hands." With this the old dame turned to leave the room.

"Hold on!" again shouted Owen, this time in a failing voice; "I daren't let my soul follow Alice's to a dishonoured grave. . . . Liza's right! I *did* shove her in the pond and held her down. She wouldn't give me another chance—may God forgive——." He got no further, but pointed to his mouth, his speech was for ever stopped by tetanus. "Thank heaven," said one, making articulate the feeling of them all, "the Lord allowed him to clear Bonny Alice before He took his speech from him."

So Owen Metcalfe died, just about the time when—had he not proved Alice's innocence—her body would have been on its way to the four cross-roads for that ignominious burial which Abbas had been at some pains to denote by sign, symbol, and mystic rite was not to be hers.

Such is one of many legends told in connection with Abbas. In all probability most of them are anachronistical, and have been made to fit in with local events of much later period to the original appearances of Abbas, whose identity is lost.

Appendix

The Act for abolishing the burial at cross-roads "of persons found *felo de se*" received the Royal Assent in July 1823, after which there were very few who received this ignominious burial.





v. *The Highwayman of Leeming Lane*

The stretch of the Great North Road called Leeming Lane, and still known locally by its old Roman name "The Street," was, in the coaching days, counted as being one of the most dangerous between London and Scotland. With the road itself no fault could be found—indeed, at a time when coaches elsewhere travelled in feet-deep ruts, the turnpike between York and Catterick was one of the best in the kingdom. There were fewer coaches overturned on the stages between these two places than almost any other, and had it not been for the highwaymen and less romantic footpads, who infested this portion of the North Road (which runs for miles without a single turn), travellers would have found it more comfortable than almost any other.

It is perhaps difficult in these days, in view of the topographical condition of the district, to understand why "the gentlemen of the road" should have chosen Leeming Lane to conduct their operations. There are few woodlands; the country is entirely flat, and less advantageous in every way than such places as Epping Forest, Maidenhead Thicket, and Finchley Common—also popular resorts of these "Road Inspectors," as they

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facetiously called themselves. Nevertheless the coaching road through the portion of Yorkshire indicated was such a hot-bed of mounted and masked desperadoes that those who were compelled to journey along it waited till such time as they could join a party of travellers; or, if they went by coach, they made their wills and said their prayers before they set out. Little wonder that Horace Walpole wrote that if the squires did not take the same interest in shooting highwaymen as they did in shooting partridges, society would be entirely undone and dissolved.

Probably one discovers some explanation of the evil reputation of Leeming Lane in a report made to the North Riding Justices in the seventeenth century regarding Robert Suttle, who was presented before them :

“ For that he (like others) doth keep a very bad house for the retaining and relieving of bad fellows, who very suspiciously ride in the High Street, called Leeming Lane, as we suspect for robbing, as we have some suspicion from circumstance.”

Robert, like other local innkeepers, acted in collusion with the highwaymen who made this road such a terror. The twain shared the spoils, and mine host was able, not only to shelter those who held up coaches and single travellers, but also to supply much valuable information from conversations he overheard.

In the autumn of 1812 greater excitement than usual was aroused in the whole of the district through which Leeming Lane runs, by a series of robberies which began with the holding up of a Mr Richard Peverley, a well-known butcher and cattle dealer, who had a farm at Pickhill. Peverley had been to York market, whither he

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had sent a drove of beasts to sell. He returned with several hundred pounds in his pockets by the coach, *The Highflyer*, which ran from London to Edinburgh, and left York early in the afternoon, travelling by way of Easingwold, Thirsk, and Northallerton. Incidentally, *The Highflyer* began to run in 1786, and continued till the coaches went off the road. The driver, old Scott, was so corpulent that he had to be hoisted on to the box, but he was a man of iron nerve for whom highwaymen had no terrors. Tradition has it that they left him severely alone, in view of the fact that he was a crack shot with a pistol; and, long before arms were carried by those in charge of the mails, he did not scruple to have a gun with him, both ends of which he said were "pretty useful."

Mr Peverley was safely set down at the door of the New Inn (now a farmhouse), in those days kept by Henry Caldwell, who horsed the mails and was considerably interested in coaching. Night had set in when he climbed down from *The Highflyer* and entered the inn, and when he had supped and entertained those who made a point of foregathering there to see the mail pass and to learn the news of the outside world, it was almost midnight when he set off to walk the couple of miles or so to Pickhill. The landlord, knowing Peverley was carrying a considerable sum in notes and gold, suggested that it would be wisdom for him to leave his wallet and capacious leather purse with him till the morrow; but the cattle dealer scouted the idea of robbers between the inn and Pickhill, and, buttoning up his greatcoat, set out into the inky darkness. Half-way along the little-used road to his native village, however, he was held up—seized from

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behind, and relieved of both gold and notes. The thief, or thieves, acted so quickly that he, or they, had disappeared almost before Peverley—just a little “in his cups”—had overcome his first surprise. The fact the “hold up” was off the beaten track, suggested to the local gossips that the thief was someone who had known of Peverley’s errand to York and subsequent movements. Whilst they were discussing the affair, another robbery occurred; the victim this time being George Cutterman,* landlord of the King’s Head, at Kirklington, another village a couple of miles or so off The Street. Again the “hold up” was in a by-way which hitherto had never been known to be frequented by either highwaymen or common footpads.

However, the landlord had reason to congratulate himself, for although the thief cleared his pockets of twenty odd guineas, a much larger sum in notes, hidden away in Cutterman’s hat, escaped his attention. Mine host had not allowed himself to be despoiled without an effort, and was counted something of a hero because of the bullet-hole he proudly showed in his coat cape, uncomfortably near the neck. News of this call to “stand and deliver,” following so close upon that of Mr Peverley, spread far and wide, and the folk returning from Ripon, Thirsk, and Bedale markets left earlier for home than was their usual wont, and then in fear and trembling. Indignation, strong and hot, filled everyone’s breast at the next exploit of the much-discussed and obviously determined “road inspector.” It was a double robbery upon a couple, known and respected

* This is an assumed name, in view of descendants of the then landlord living in the neighbourhood.

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throughout a wide area, one of them coming of a very old family who had long owned and tilled land in the district. The two young people had for five years been servants with Cutterman; the one, Tom Almack, as hostler; the other, Polly, as serving-maid. For some reason now forgotten Almack had become estranged from his family, and, expecting nothing from that quarter to assist him to "set up for himself" when he married, he and Polly had been saving every penny they could scrape together, with a small farm ultimately in view.

Just when excitement was at its height regarding the dangerous character infesting the district, Polly and her sweetheart left the King's Head to be married, Cutterman publicly presenting them each with a golden guinea for luck as they set off on their longish tramp to East Appleton, where lived Polly's parents. With a very light heart they set out, but ere they had travelled a little more than a mile they were stopped by a masked and armed man, who gruffly bid them hand over such money as they possessed. Almack did not surrender their five years' savings without a fight, and it was not until he was laid unconscious and wounded—Polly thought shot dead—that the highwayman received from her trembling hands the bag containing their all.

As luck would have it the Bedale doctor drove up just as Polly had decided to leave her sweetheart and walk to the nearest farmhouse for assistance. The doctor, who knew them both, not only staunched the bleeding, but took the twain into his trap and drove them the remaining portion of their journey. That same evening Tom told his sweetheart to keep her heart up—they had

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still each other. And then he added these mysterious words which set those who heard them a-wondering :

“We’ve got to start all ower again, but it mebbe won’t be as long as five months, let alone five years, before we have more brass than has been taken from us. There’s a reward offered to them that can catch the thief who robbed us . . . and I know summat.”

Cuttermen a few days later sent a message with a local farmer whom he met at market, that he had not filled either Tom’s or Polly’s places, and, as they had been unfortunate enough to lose their money, he was willing to take Polly back immediately and Almack when he was sufficiently recovered to fulfil his duties. So Polly regretfully left her sweetheart, now convalescent, and returned to the King’s Head at Kirklington. Shortly afterwards Tom accidentally met a cousin of Mr Peverley, and asked him to tell Richard the next time he saw him that he (Almack) had a confidential communication to make to him, and would be glad to meet him at the Bridge Inn at Catterick next time he came that way. In due course an appointment was made in the round-about manner in which messages were at that time sent. In the meantime the mystery man continued his series of most impudent thefts. Success seemed to embolden him despite all the attempts made to earn the reward offered for his capture. He was like a will-o’-the-wisp—now here, now there, now mounted, now on foot, always relentless, and entirely devoid of either the courtesy or generosity of the general run of highwaymen, who only aimed at big game and often took toll from the rich to give to the poor. Amongst other robberies this mystery

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man—for not even a “nick” name could yet be given to him—successfully carried out was one which aroused even more public indignation than the despoiling of Tom and Polly. It certainly was a heartless theft.

Very briefly the story is as follows :—In a little wayside cottage to the south of Catterick lived an old couple in very reduced circumstances. The husband had been bedfast for some time, and it seemed almost providential that an aunt, who lived near York, should depart from this naughty and wicked world and leave them a legacy of about a couple of hundred pounds—to them a huge fortune. It was on the wife’s return from York with this windfall, and whilst she and her husband were counting and re-counting the guineas on his bed—the notes had immediately been hidden for safety—that the door opened and a masked man entered the cottage. Without a word he walked up to the bed, pocketed the heap of guineas, and threatened that if the remainder of the money which had been brought from York was not immediately forthcoming he would shoot the wife and burn the house over the invalid’s head. The terrified woman without delay produced the roll of notes, but entreated the visitor to leave one seeing that she had spent the last of their means on her journey to York. To this he briefly and callously replied that they were fortunate in not having their lives taken too. He then left the house and was seen to mount his horse, which he had tethered at the back of the house, and gallop away on the stretch of grass by the roadside.

Almack hearing of the renewed activities of the highwayman and also that the bulk of his haul was in paper,

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ot the Bedale printer to run off some bills stating that the numbers of the stolen notes were known, and that their payment had been stopped. He visited the old couple, inquired particularly as to the colour and markings of the horse their unwelcome guest had ridden, shook his head knowingly, and bid them be of good cheer, promising that ere long most of their money would be returned to them. His concluding remark was somewhat cryptic and remembered to this day. It was this: "Bide your time, the tup (ram) which butts often breaks its own head in the end."

This robbery resulted in the reward for the capture of the robber, or information leading to his arrest, being increased to one hundred guineas. "It will be a bigger sum than that before long," said Tom, when he first read the bill which was widely circulated. Hardly were they posted on gatepost, pinfold doors, and hung in the tap-room of every inn, than about two miles south of the Oak Tree hostelry, an attempt was made to stop The Highflyer single-handed. This was the first time the might of the road—for it was certainly "the mystery man"—had flown at high game or ventured to ply his rabbit-ending trade on the main road.

This attack on the stage coach failed, thanks to the coolness of Scott, the coachman. He saw at once that he was an amateur with whom he had to deal—at any rate he wasn't one of the *habitués* of the stretch of road along which Scott had so long driven. So, instead of pulling up when called upon to do so by the pistol-in-hand would-be robber, Scott handed his loaded whip to the young nobleman who always travelled on the box with him when going North.

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“ Aim true, and strike hard, my lord,” said Scott; “ I’ll drive straight for him and you give him the weight of that brass knob before he has time to fire.” Shaking his leaders up the coachman tooled his team as though he would gallop over the top of the masked assailant. One of two courses were open to the highwayman. He must either back his horse on to the stretch of grass by the roadside and watch the coach tear past, or he must stand his ground and trust to his aim to bring down one of the leaders when they were almost on top of him. He saw, however, that if his aim was not true, if his own horse moved as he was about to fire, or if the leader did not immediately fall bringing the other three down with it and thus stopping the coach, he was likely to find himself under the wheels, probably injured, and then—well, that meant capture and death. . . . It was too risky to be chanced, so he reined back just in time to miss being run down, but not far enough to escape the swinging blow which fell upon his head and almost brought him from the saddle.

“ Well done ! ” cried the driver, and a cheer went up from the outside passengers as the coach swayed alarmingly before regaining the centre of the road again and continuing on its way at a furious gallop. Those inside screamed as the coach righted itself, and thrust their heads out of the window to learn the cause of the pace at which they were travelling. They had been quite unconscious of the drama which had been enacted, till they saw behind them the masked figure with head hanging over his horse’s neck and blood dripping upon the grass. Soon he was a mere speck in the distance, and

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at least of the passengers had cause for great thankfulness, for he had in his possession perhaps the largest collection of diamonds ever carried in a stage coach—collection which is still in the possession of a Scottish noble house whither it was then bound.

The authorities had hitherto looked upon the elusive thief as some footpad, who had stolen a horse, and was being sheltered by an accomplice between Boroughbridge and Catterick. When, however, the report of the attempted “hold up” of *The Highflyer* reached them they took a more serious view; and, as Almack had prophesied, forthwith increased the reward offered either for the capture, or for information which would result in this new road pest being handed over to justice. So yet another bill was added to the ever-increasing rows, offering two hundred guineas as a bait to those who might know the identity of “the person who had attempted to hold up *The Highflyer* and who had been guilty of sundry other daring robberies.” When Almack read this bill and saw the increased “head money,” he said to his friends who were waiting to see him off with the carrier’s cart *en route* for Pickhill: “Every one of those two hundred guineas will be mine before a couple of months have passed . . . you wait!”

The interview with Mr Peverley had resulted in that gentleman engaging Tom to assist him on his farm and with some young horses he had to break in. As stated, whilst waiting for the conveyance which was to take him to Pickhill lane-end that Almack saw the new reward announcement for the first time. Being so near Kirklington it was not long before Tom rode over to

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see Polly and spend the evening at the King's Head. Whilst having a friendly glass with some of his erstwhile companions in the tap-room Tom's attention was called by Cutterman to the poster on the wall with its bold type, "200 GUINEAS REWARD." "If you could only lay your hands on him, Tom," said the landlord, "that would set you on your legs again."

"I'm going to catch him," said Tom, adding, "he got all me and Polly had, but I'll get upsides with him yet, master. I've waited a good bit, but my time will come."

"Well! I wish you luck, Tom," said his former employer, changing the subject of conversation.

Since this increase of the reward, however, the highwayman seemed to have disappeared, and a feeling began to gain ground that either he had left the neighbourhood for another part of the road, or that the blow he had received when he endeavoured to hold up *The Highflyer* had incapacitated him. About three weeks after Almack had gone to Mr Peverley, he rode over to see Polly early one afternoon. "Hello," said Cutterman, "what brings you here at this time of day?"

"Why!" replied Tom, "I shouldn't have come if Polly had not been here; but as I have to be at the New Inn when *The Highflyer* passes, I thought I would come on a bit sooner and see how Polly was getting on. I reckon it's a bit of a fool's errand that I've come on, but you see Peverley's been fleeced once, and he doesn't mean to be dropped on again. He's bringing a lot of brass with him from Durham fair, and as he's going straight on to York, I have to be at the New Inn when the coach comes up. He'll then give me the money to

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ke home. . . . No one will think that *I* have three
four hundred pounds on me, and besides, the highway-
an has taken himself off somewhere, so there is really
othing to fear," ingenuously exclaimed Tom when he
and the landlord were alone together.

"But," said Cutterman, "what'll you do, Tom, if
ou *are* stopped? You don't carry a pistol, do you?"

"No!" answered Tom; "I daren't fire one off if I
ad one. I should most likely shoot myself. I don't
ven carry a whip with a brass knob on it! . . . but I
eckon, as I have said before, there's nothing to fear.
he chap's nowhere about here now."

When Tom had left his sweetheart and arrived at the
ew Inn, he was apparently overjoyed to meet in the tap-
oom two old friends, whom he had not seen for years.
They announced, loud enough for all and sundry to hear,
that they were seeking horses for the army. Did Tom
now of any likely to suit them? Almack thought Mr
everley had two, which they could see in the morning,
ut his master would not be home until the Friday
ollowing. He knew that his late employer also had three
r four for sale. Then, turning to one of those sitting
ear, he said: "Tell Cutterman we'll look him up first
thing in the morning."

Presently the coach drew up. Peverley handed a
eather bag to Tom as the coach was about to roll away
ork-wards. Tom and his friends then parted, the latter
aving arranged to be at Pickhill first thing in the
orning.

Close on ten the following morning the trio drove up
o the King's Head at Kirklington. Tom, of course,

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had a word or two with Polly, whom he thought strangely excited and nervous. All the hurried explanation she gave was that "master has been very funny since he got kicked on the head with one of the horses." The quartette adjourned to the stables. As the buyers were discussing the horses before they saw them "trotted out," Cutterman said to Tom: "Then you got home safe with your money last night?"

When this question was put to Tom he was seated on the corn bin kicking his heels against the side. He replied, looking his questioner full in the face: "I never had any money to take home, and if I *had* had any, I shouldn't have carried it safely if you had had *your* way."

"If I had had *my* way!" ejaculated Cutterman, "what do you mean? You said you had I don't know how much to carry home." Then, glancing nervously at the stable door, he saw that the supposed horse-dealers had stationed themselves one at each side of it.

"I know that I *told* you so—I came on purpose to tell you that tale," said Tom, "just to find out if by any chance you might go into Pickhill lonning to try to get it from me, as you did before in Appleton lonning. You *did* come last night—it *must* have been you that was there, for you were the only soul to whom I told the tale—and in the dark you stopped Jack Kendrew thinking it was me: but when he spoke you knew his voice and told him to sit in the hedge bottom till you gave him leave to go. As it happened *I* was in the hedge bottom myself quite near, and stopped there till you were out of sight, and then I took a short cut over the fields to Kirklington

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corner just to make sure that it *was* you. These two gentlemen were with me and were for nabbing you then, but I said you'd tumbled into the trap without knowing it, and it would pay *me*, at any rate, better to wait till this morning so that I could get Polly's and my savings back, as well as the reward for your capture. These gentlemen have come from York and they're going to take you back with them."

Cutterman, with a fearful oath, made a furious dash for liberty ; but almost as if by machinery he was tripped up and handcuffed before he knew what had happened.

Ten minutes search in the house, together with the tell-tale mark on his head, put beyond all doubt Cutterman's guilt. Almost the first convicting proof which they discovered was the bundle of notes belonging to the old couple near Catterick. Then in a secret drawer in Cutterman's bureau was found the mask worn on his expeditions, and other property recognised as having been stolen.

The news quickly spread, and quite a crowd gathered at the New Inn to see Cutterman depart by the coach for York. Such derisive cries greeted the ears of the prisoner as : " You've given Tom more than you took from him ! " " You'll look well, George, when you can't reach the ground with your toes." " After what you did to the old folk near Catterick I could hang you myself." But, after all, Cutterman was *not* hanged, nor did he ever reach York. When on top of the coach he persuaded his gaolers to remove his handcuffs, and as they considered him quite safe between them there, they acquiesced. Cutterman waited his opportunity, and as the coach was

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passing a load of hay he took a flying leap, and sliding down from the waggon, sped away with the fleetness of one who knew that his life was at stake. A hue and cry was raised, but Cutterman was never either heard of or seen again. Doubtless during the night he secured funds from some hidden store, which he had laid by in case he ever had to flee the country at a moment's notice. Nevertheless, having once been captured, the reward was paid to Almack, and he and Polly were duly married.





vi. The Wicked Giant of Penhill

Penhill, in Wensleydale, standing 1680 feet above the sea-level, and once the isolated home of the Knights Templars, has associated with it one of those interesting legends which probably came to us through the sagas of the Norsemen. Here, long before the twelfth century, when the Knights Templars sang their peaceful offices, there lived a Giant, a lineal descendant of Thor and Sif, whose diabolical cruelties made him loathed and feared far beyond the borders of Richmondshire. Ferocity, brutality, and sensuality marked his forbidding countenance. He gloated over his schemes for torture and their execution; indeed, they, together with his herd of swine, seemed to be his main concerns in life. These swine—one of the biggest herds in the whole vale of York—he had in the vast forest of Richmondshire, or that part of it around his home on Penhill, and it was his almost daily pleasure to number them, to ride or walk amongst them, and reckon his wealth therein. Like most landowners of that day he counted his riches in the number of his pigs, and he seems to have possessed a wonderful boarhound, or wolfhound, which enabled him to round up his herd and see that the tale was correct as well as note the improvement in their condition.

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Now this dog plays a considerable part in the story of the Giant of Penhill, so that it is well that something should be said regarding it at the outset. It has been orally handed down from generation to generation that it bore the name of Wolfhead, and that it was baptised as a pup by the Giant with the baptism of human blood and much Pagan ritual. The legend runs that when still very young the Giant happened upon a lovely hillside shepherdess tending her father's few sheep—for sheep were not yet the greatest asset of the moorland farmers. It amused the owner of Wolfhead to set the dog upon the sheep, and to watch him seize them by the throat and tear them till the red blood stained their fleece. The maiden fell down on her knees before the Giant and begged him to call off the savage dog or ruin would inevitably come to her whole household. Their rent they paid in wool, and the salted meat of the three-shear wethers was to be their food for the winter. The more she pleaded, the more the monster lord of Penhill laughed—aye! laughed till the very hills seemed to shake and every golden plover, raven, and hooded crow took flight as though a whole army of hawks had darkened the horizon. And then the laughter stopped! It is said that a maiden is never so beautiful as when she lifts up her tear-filled eyes in supplication. Possibly it was so with this Venus of the heathlands. Anyhow, the dog was called to heel, and his owner began with honeyed and flattering speech to make love to the girl. It was not long, however, ere his attentions became offensive to her, and she took the first opportunity which presented itself to slip away into the heart of the wood much faster than

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the Giant, in his mighty boots, could follow her. But, if she in her shapely unshod feet was fleet, Wolfhead was speedier still, and it was not long before he was sent in pursuit and was tearing off her scanty clothing piece by piece. The Giant's momentary anger now turned to mirth. Here, indeed, was a pretty hunt, with such a quarry as did not often fall to him. Again he roared with laughter as he panted after the maiden, now calling Wolfhead back, now hounding him on again to further strip the terrified and almost nude girl. At length Gunda, as she was called, could go no further, and, tripping amongst some briars, fell to the ground with the dog on top of her. Her hands felt a stone, and, seizing it, she struck the dog with all her remaining strength on the fleshy part of the nose. Howling with pain the young hound slunk behind its master, who strode up infuriated, and, with one blow of his spiked club, killed her as she lay. There and then he smeared his favourite with some of the life's blood which flowed from Gunda's head and gave to it its name.

This was but one more crime to add to the long list, but retribution came in the end; and the day dawned when the Giant and Wolfhead entered the forest for the last time, and when the swineherds heard the winding of their lord's horn no more. One day he went to number his swine which, by long practice and by the aid of the swineherds' dogs and the wonderful Wolfhead, filed past him two abreast—the young boars at the head of the procession, and those (growing impotent) which had given them place, in the rear. As the latter, with their long bristles and worn tushes, came up, the Giant saw one

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without its mate. The herd was driven past him again with like result—one was undoubtedly missing. The descendant of Thor fumed at the swineherds till they shook with fear; and then, giving Wolfhead a cruel blow on the head, he bade him search the moor and bring up the truant, emphasising his orders with a kick from his heavy boot. Away went the hound sullenly growling, and at a respectful distance the swineherds stood trembling. As the missing boar was not brought back the Giant addressed his serfs thus :

“ Wolfhead is growing idle ; moreover, he dared to growl at me and to show his teeth ; this night I’ll thrust a spear through him. You are not worthy of so easy a death ; unless that boar is found before I reach Penhill, and your horns proclaim the fact for me to hear, I’ll strip the skin from off your backs with this Thor’s belt of mine, and leave you bound for the wolves to eat their fill and the ravens to pick your bones white. Get ye gone about my bidding quickly, for my stride is long and I am now about to start for Penhill crags. Hardly had he begun his homeward journey ere he heard the deep, bell-like notes of Wolfhead borne to him in the breeze. He hastened in the direction from which the sound came and saw the hound in a small clearing. . . . But there was no joyous welcome as heretofore, no triumphant wagging of Wolfhead’s tail that he had accomplished that which he had been sent to do. The high spirits of the huge dog were cowed ; he, the only living creature with any affection for his master, had lost the love he had and slunk away further and further at the angry bidding to come to heel. With the lord of Penhill disobedience

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meant death, and could he but have reached Wolfhead he would have despatched him then and there; failing this he picked up a boulder to hurl it at the dog, but stopped transfixed, for there amongst the bracken he saw the missing boar pierced through the heart with an arrow.

The Giant's rage knew no bounds. He roared aloud like a maddened bull in his anger, and the valleys echoed the terrible threats of torture which he promised to he who had dared to lift his bow. "I'll tear the arms from the sockets of every grown man and stripling who can hold a bow but what I'll find the hand that sped that arrow. . . . And when I have found it I'll burn it off, and burn out the eyes which watched it cut the air." Then, slinging the boar over his shoulders with as much ease as though it had been a kitten, he hurried home with mighty strides hissing threats between his teeth in which he held the arrow he had withdrawn.

Summoning his steward he ordered him to ride forth to each dwelling within a given radius and proclaim that every male who could draw a man's bow must assemble at Penhill that day week ere the sun turned upon its downward course; and to further make it known that should any fail to heed these commands they would be thrown into the deepest dungeon under the castle for the remainder of their days. There was consternation over the whole district. Not a soul knew who had drawn the shaft to pierce the boar, but all *did* know that no greater crime in the eyes of the relentless Giant could be committed.

Time and time again did the Penhill monster call for

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Wolfhead to be brought to him, and on each occasion the answer was the same, that the hound had neither returned nor been seen. At last, however, news came that he had been seen lurking in the woodland nearest the castle, but refused to approach nearer. On hearing this the Giant seized his bow, climbed to the topmost turret, and sounded his horn. In a very little time Wolfhead responded as of yore to the call and appeared on the outskirts of the woodland, then sat on his haunches looking wistfully to his old home. Then, more piercingly than a November gale, the lord of Penhill whistled, but the hound made no other motion beyond pricking his ears. There he sat as though of carved stone, till in a fury the Giant drew his bow and the shaft sped through the air. In a few seconds Wolfhead lay struggling in death throes on the ground. Then sorrow and remorse filled the heart of the Giant. He had wantonly destroyed his only real friend ! Though full of contrition he was more eager than ever for revenge, placing the blame at the door of him who had dared to transgress the most stringent of the forest laws by killing one of the boars in the castle herd.

On the day appointed for the assembly at Penhill, a terrified crowd stood without the castle awaiting they knew not what. It was not long before the ponderous, long-haired, saw-toothed ogre towered above them holding aloft the fatal arrow.

“Who fashioned this shaft and who drew it ?” he demanded, without any prelude.

There was a deathly stillness as one looked at another. Not a soul spoke.

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“I command any who recognise the shaft to let its owner’s name be known,” said the Giant. . . . But the silence still remained unbroken. “Curs ! dolts ! you dare to defy me, do you ? Then begone from my sight. One of your number has ventured a shaft at one of my best boars, and as he chooses to keep his tongue tight between his teeth and none of you will raise a voice against him, then blood shall be spilled from the household of each of you. By the God Thor, my ancestor, I will do it, and in a way to my own liking too. Ere to-morrow’s sun sets every father of a man-child amongst you will meet me at my swine-pen with the last-born male babe, and if their death shrieks do not open your stubborn lips . . . Well ! the following week we’ll have the next-born man-child in each family ; and the next and the next if needs be. See to it that the fathers of families—though the family be but one and that but born between now and the rising sun to-morrow—bring each his first-born male here to-morrow as I have ordered. . . . Away, now, with you all ! ”

“Haste not for a moment, my brave bowmen, and haste thou not too fast, O mighty Giant,” said an old man with a long grey beard and with a curiously carved crooked stick in his hand. He stepped boldly forward from the company and continued to address the lord of Penhill : “And when these who are fathers *do* come hither to-morrow, *what then* ? ”

“Who art thou to dare question me, greybeard ? There will happen to-morrow whatsoever I please with the babes *and* their fathers. I have power over life and death, and ’twill profit thee to keep a civil tongue in thy

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head," snapped the Giant, as a cornered fox or badger snaps at the stick with which his persecutors torment him.

"Is that thy answer?" quietly asked the seer of Caperby—for it was he, though the Giant seemed to be the only one who failed to recognise him. "Is *that* thy answer?" repeated the old man.

"It is all I'll give to thee unless thou'd have an answer from my bow, which shoots as straight, or straighter, than any of those carried by the men around thee." The Giant's eyes flashed fire in his anger, and there were many who feared for the safety of the aged wiseman who had so long lived a hermit life amongst them. They were amazed at his temerity when he stood his ground unflinchingly and addressed the fuming lord with these impressive words of caution:

"If thou, who claims to have the blood of the mighty Thor in thy veins, dost dare to leave thy castle with evil design in thy heart against the babes which will be hither brought to-morrow—which haply is Thor's day—I warn thee that should thou spill so much as one drop of blood of any of them, or so much as make one of those little ones cry out in pain or fear, then neither dead nor alive shalt thou again enter thy castle. . . . I speak that which I know though not words of my own mouth."

For a moment the angry Giant was spellbound. One of his retainers had whispered to him who it was that spoke the warning, and that the hermit seer could look into the future with clear vision. It was only for a moment, however, that the Giant's tongue was stilled; then he burst out into a roar of laughter and followed it with words of derision and command:

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“Think’st to frighten me, old wrassled barebones with grey beard? Had I not in my mind other sport with thee I’d have thee thrown into the dungeon now to eat thy words. Get thee to thy cave, but see to it that thou, too, art here to-morrow with the rest of them to mark how much I value thy warning and to learn what will do with thee.” With this the Giant turned on his heel and re-entered the castle.

The following morning sorrowing fathers and weeping mothers climbed the sides of Penhill with their babes clasped to them. The first arrivals found the seer already at the swine-pen leaning on his staff, and to each as they came he spoke a word of hope and comfort, assuring them that every babe would be carried home unhurt. From what was known as “The Giant’s quint” in the Castle the ogre watched the assembly collect, and gloated over the plan he had in view. As he was about to depart with a razor-sharp flint battle-axe in hand, Whitebeard, one of his oldest and most trusted servants, approached him, and falling down on his knees begged he would hear him :

“Hearken, great and mighty lord,” he began, “to a strange dream which thy servant has had and of which thou should’st know. Hearken also to what thy servant hath seen these three nights past. There have been ravens and carrion crows hovering over the swine-pen, and yestere’en nine ravens circled nine times round the castle, and then lighted upon it, and there each cawed nine times ere they all took their flight. My lord knows that this bodeeth no good, and more so as the old seer’s raven with the white feathers in its tail seemed to be

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the leader of them. And then came my dream in which I saw the mighty one of Penhill laid stretched in death, and by his side lay Wolfhead, with crimsoned jaws, and the carved stick of the seer pointing towards both. I know not what it all meaneth, but I beg my lord not to venture forth from the castle this day, for, as I live, I believe that harm will come."

Seizing the old man by his girdle, the Giant swung him round and crashed his head upon the ground, then crushing his face to pulp with his heel, he said: "'There is thy reward for such service as to league with those toads outside and bear false tales to fright me.'" With this the Giant strode out. When he had banged the door behind him, the bleeding Whitebeard crawled to the outer yard and brought nine battens of straw, then nine armsful of ling, and nine skeps of turf (peat). These he fashioned in a heap in the centre of the banqueting hall, and, lighting the straw, piled the wooden chairs around the fire, threw all the treen (wooden bowls and platters) and skins upon it, and departed in the direction of the swine-pen. He arrived in time to see his cruel master discover his path barred by nine of his boars laid dead. Three times nine strides did he take in his fury and haste to reach the assembly below, and then nine more dead swine did he find laid across the causeway; and so was it all the way along his journey. In orderly rows—row after row—were the carcasses, always nine in number, laid. Finally, he came upon the weeping crowd when he was almost demented with rage.

"Not only your babes, but the blood of every living soul here shall redden Penhill this day," he began; "I'll

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give the croaking ravens such a feast as they have never known before. They shall be gorged till they cannot roak." And then his eye fell upon the old seer standing alone, statuesque, quietly smiling at the torrents of rage which terrified all the rest. "Come here, churl and chatterer, I would a word with thee," shrieked the Giant. "Were thou Thor himself," replied the seer, "I am neither serf nor servant of thine. Would'st thou have speech with me come hither. I have already said my say and thy braggart heart heeded not. . . . Turn and look from whence thou camest then wilt thou see I spake not folly."

Glancing backward, the Giant saw from Penhill a dense volume of smoke which hid the castle from view, and, as he stood spellbound, nine tongues of flame leaped out from amid the smoke. Then he knew that never again, dead or alive, could he enter what had been his castle. . . . The first part of the prophecy had been fulfilled! Swinging his axe over his head as he walked he made straight for the seer, who had now joined the wondrous and horrified crowd. The seer was pointing with his mystic stick, not to the castle, but to some object the Giant could not yet see. When he reached the crowd, there in the midst of them he saw old Whitebeard with mutilated face, also pointing; and, staying his hand amid the fascination of the scene, the lord of Penhill looked too. . . . The axe fell from his fingers, his knees shook, he hid his eyes yet found himself compelled to look again. Then backwards he walked step by step as there slowly advanced the astral form of Gunda, the maiden whom he had done to death. All present had

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known her, all present saw her now with Wolfhead—baptised with her own life's blood—straining at the leash she held. As if mesmerised and unable to turn, the Giant still retreated step by step till he had reached the very edge of the precipice. Then did the shepherdess slip Wolfhead, who, with one bound, was at his once cruel master's throat. Down into the abyss the Giant and the phantom hound disappeared; and there was that huge battered carcase left for the already circling carrion crows and ravens to pick white his bones: and thus was Wensleydale and the whole of Richmondshire ridded of an evil pestilence, and unclean thing, which had so long been their terror sleeping and waking.





vii. *The Maid of the Golden Shoon*

About the year 1840, when almost a nonagenarian, one Bessy Ellis, of Appleton-le-Moor, carried to the grave with her a fund of local lore and legend. In 1771, when about eight years old, she went to live with her grandmother at Ingleby Greenhow, and during the seven years she remained there she often heard the story of "The Golden Shoon," which so impressed her youthful mind that she was able to relate every detail when weighted with the burden of many years. In 1897, when staying with the then vicar of Lastingham, near Appleton-le-Moor, the late Richard Blakeborough discovered in the parish an old man who had often heard Mistress Ellis tell the story as had William Scorer (to whom my father was indebted for so much traditional lore). At the time the Scorer family lived at Baysdale Abbey Bessy Ellis frequently stayed with them and entertained them in the long evenings—longer than elsewhere, in that isolated dale—with tales of long ago. From these two independent sources my father had the legend, and found both versions almost identical. It may be that

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Mistress Ellis's grandmother, who would hear the story told somewhere *circa* 1690-1700, localised it—as such folk-tales *were* localised. Be that as it may, it is well worth preserving, embracing as it does all those features which those of other days so loved to hear as they sat in the ingle-nook—magic and mystery; the excitement of the probable spiced with the impossible; the fight against evil and ultimate conquest of all machinations and temptations. And now for the story which, it is recorded, Bessy Ellis invariably prefaced with the home-made epigram: “A prude is very often a young miss who turns up her nose i' public at what she gloats over i' private.”

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Many a long year since, the ancient village of Ingleby Greenhow was stirred to its very core. There were angry looks, mingled with deep fear, on every face; sorrow, too, was there, and threats of vengeance were heard. The simple folk living at the foot of the hills whispered one to another when they met at the well and in the village street, and asked: “What could it mean?—another gone!” Little wonder was there that they should be disturbed in mind and spirit, for during the last five months, one regularly each month, a suckling babe had been snatched from among them by some unseen, mysterious agency, which none could fathom. The night the fifth was spirited away, a young mother, a widow, had lain down by the side of her little one—the only link which bound her to an all too brief happy wedded life—and, waking suddenly, found the infant gone though she had held it clasped in her arms. Broken-

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hearted, she roused her neighbours, but they were impotent in the darkness and could only try to comfort her.

Next morning there was no merry ring upon the blacksmith's anvil, and gathered around the door of the forge was a little group of greybeards, now and then reinforced by the arrival of other villagers. There they stood in earnest conversation impatiently awaiting the arrival of the local wiseman, Robby Eskletts, to whom had been sent an urgent summons to come and assist them with his advice in their dire need of such counsel. At last the old man was seen coming along the stone-flagged trod leading from the churchyard, and soon he was seated in the chair set for him.

"A sad day! O wae's me! and sadder deed, my friends," began the hermit seer, laying his sticks crosswise on the ground at his feet. "You sent for me when the other poor bairns went, but I heeded not your bidding, for I could then bring neither a reading of your plight nor succour. The time for me had not come! Now I think, and hope, it has."

At this pronouncement a deep sigh of relief went up, for not only was it known that Robby was skilled in the solution of mysteries and the combating of evil spells and influences, but also that he habitually spoke with great caution, and was inclined rather to underestimate than exaggerate his forensic and occult powers. The old man continued:

"As a secret sits uneasy on many tongues, I think it wise that what I have to say should be heard by only two or three whom you shall pick from your number. The rest will not take it ill if I ask them to take home the

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news that I see in the future hope for the little ones who have gone and no fear for those who are left. . . . It is for the best that all except those four to whom my sticks point should hasten home and bide there."

When the four whom the ends of the sticks had indicated were alone with Robby he immediately began to unfold a strange tale which he prefaced by saying: "It may mean much, it may mean nowt, for one can never know for certain at the time whether a vision is given to us by good or evil spirits. It fell out oddly that the message you sent to me that the fifth poor bairn had gone like the others, came whilst I was yet unravelling my thoughts. Last night I either dreamt, or my spirit was taken out of my body, and I saw on the moor strange things which it may be are the key to that which you seek to be riddled for you. The spot I saw in my sleep—or otherwise, as it may be—was one I well knew years ago, but which I have not been at since then. There were three lone larch trees there—they perhaps still stand for aught I know—nigh to the great badger earth." "They still remain," volunteered one of the quartette. "I was standing near to a boulder," continued the old man, nodding approvingly at the information given, "and on this boulder (we called it 'the wishing stone' when I was a boy) I sat. A voice from some unseen fairy or spirit whispered in my ear: 'Be still, stir not, speak not! watch and mark well all you both see and hear, then wilt thou undo doings which have filled full hearts now fit to break.' As I sat and watched there came from amongst the bracken a great number of hagworms. Seizing each other by the tail they formed themselves

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thus into a mighty circle round the boulder. No sooner had they done so than a sky-blackening flock of ravens appeared in sight. They settled upon the ground and straightway enclosed the hagworms in another ring. This they did by extending their wings till the tip of each touched that of another. They were followed by more owls than any man hath seen at one time, and they, too, did as the ravens had done. Nor was this all, for an equal number of nightjars arrived from the east and made yet a fourth ring. As these creatures of evil began to slowly move—each circle in the opposite direction to that in front and behind it—there sprang into the midst of the inner circle several aufs¹ of bad countenance. How, or from whence, they came I know not, but they were not long ere they set about their business. It was as though they could not see me, for they lighted a fire upon the boulder from which ascended a cloud of black reek² like a pillar. No sooner did it seem to reach the sky than there came such a screeching above as only night-hags can make. There must have been many of these dames of ill-deed, but only three let upon the ground astride of their bizzum-sticks.³ Two of them I did not recognise, but the third I saw at once to be ‘Black Meg,’ who had in her hand the skin of a newly flayed black cat, whilst one of the others carried a little child. The three wrapped the infant within the skin of the cat, and, holding the babe between them, they began to dance round the fire. The hagworms, the ravens, the owls, and nightjars again set themselves in motion as before. The black smoke now changed to a bright blue flame which lighted

¹ Aufs=elves.

² Reek=smoke.

³ Bizzum=besom (brush).

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up all that part of the moor. The ravens croaked, the owls made the night hideous with their hoots, the night-jars murned like mutes at a burying, but above all the din I heard the shrieks of the three hags as they danced and repeated their incantation. I have seen many strange sights in my time, but never one so much like Hell let loose as this. Faster and faster they all circled round, till at last the child was flung into the blue flame, from which it immediately sprang, not a babe, but a wick ¹ black cat. As it did so Meg seized it, she and her companions remounted their sticks, and as they flew away so did all their devil's friends disappear as the blue flame shot down under the boulder, and only I, old Robby, was left. Now, it is well known that Meg has several black cats which she keeps about her hearth, and I have jealoused that these may be none other than the bairns which have been spirited away from among you. She must not know that any of us have this in our mind or that I was at the three larches last night. That might spoil all! To-day when the sun is at its highest, go ye four to the spot I have named, taking with you a two-feathered arrow, in the making of which each of you has had a hand, and the feathers of which have been trimmed by a true virgin. Each of you will give this shaft three flights, but should it pierce the ground on the third flight drawn by any of you let that suffice. The omen is good, and the arrow should there be left till darkness is falling. Then return to the spot, lay seven limmel-stones ² around the shaft, and then

¹ Lively.

² Stones with a hole through the centre, used as a talisman, and often hung outside buildings to ward off evil spells. Sometimes called "holy stones."

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two of you will stand within the circle and repeat a charm which I will give to you. Having done this, you and the others will clap down behind the boulder and wait for what may follow. I will bide here with the smith, and ere you cross your own doorsteps come to me and tell all that you have seen so that I may know what is best to be done."

The four auditors immediately left the old man to set about fashioning the arrow and preparing themselves for their journey. They did all as they had been instructed, and were not kept waiting long behind the boulder ere they saw a flickering of rainbow lights within the circle of the seven stones they had found with holes through their centres. Then an army of glowworms arrived within the circle making a phosphorescent carpet upon which a concourse of fairies suddenly appeared. Some carried tiny musical pipes of silvery hue, and behind them came half a dozen sturdy hobmen bearing a stretcher on which lay a book. This they set down near to the arrow. Gathering round it in a circle the fairies began to chant from its open page. The first part of their song dealt with the evil days which had fallen upon the village at the foot of the hills below them. From a mournful tone the song turned to that of anger, as they told of one who had lately given herself to evil ways, thereby bringing sorrow to many a mother's heart. Then again the music changed to a livelier strain, and, whilst one band played in jubilation, the other danced for very joy as the singers told—still from the pages of the open book—of coming gladness, of a day quite near at hand when there should appear amongst them a maiden lovely beyond compare

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who would work out the deliverance for which they, and every suckling mother and every mother to be, prayed. There would be no mistaking the damsel, for she would be shod in golden shoon of dazzling brightness as well as being so strikingly beautiful as to set her apart from all other maidens. And thus the fairy choir sang :

It shall be that a maid to the village will come,
She shall come when the sun, at noon,
Shines far overhead most clear and bright.

She shall succour the mothers in sorest plight,
Shall this Maid of the Golden Shoon.

Let no one pry, from whither she be,

Or how long she'll think fit to stay ;

But serve ye your best of food and of rest

[Lines forgotten]

Let not your turfstones cool ;

From your rafter string let your havver cake hing.

The song went on to narrate how the fates had ordained that the only way by which the wicked spell and the power for evil of the three witches could be broken, was that the Maid of the Golden Shoon should don the armour of some brave knight who had never been vanquished in battle or joust and had never wilfully brought the blush of shame to the brow of maid or wife. Then the song (parts of which unfortunately could not be remembered) went on :

Then seek ye a place in the thickest part
Of the wood where it darkest be.

There build ye a bower, so that sun nor moon
May shine on the Maid of the Golden Shoon,
When she hies to her privacy. . . .

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Thence the mystic maid and the gallant knight would retire and exchange their dress, the knight playing the dual rôle of squire and maid to her of the Golden Shoon.

When the fairies had ended their song and dance they drew forth the arrow and laid it upon the book as if to indicate that both were to be taken away for future guidance. The rainbow carpet then began to rise like a pearly mist, hiding the departure of the elves; the glowworms extinguished each its tiny lamp, and only the book and the arrow remained to convince the watchers behind the boulder that they had not been the victims of some optical illusion or trick of imagination. With all haste they returned with their tokens to Robby at the smith's house, and when the seer had heard their story he beamed with satisfaction and addressed them thus :

“ Go ye home and make it known that there will come presently amongst you a lovely maiden wearing upon her feet a pair of golden shoon. Bid your neighbours set their sons and daughters building a bower for her according to the commands of the fairies and as written in their book. It must be woven together in the thickest part of the wood, and, when finished, not a glimmer of light must enter. There must be wickenwood worked into the entering place, over which will hang an arras of skins, and none may go near it after it be finished unless the maid give them leave. But before you do anything in this matter, or breathe a word to living soul, let the smith here go to Black Meg's cottage riding a piebald horse if such can be gotten. Standing upon her doorstone, and with the bobbin in his hand but the sneck unlifted, he will repeat a charm, and with charcoal from burned wickenwood he will

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make a sign (which I will show him when I give him the charm) upon the doorstone, hiding it with sand, so that when Meg comes forth in the morning she may fail to notice it. Watch for her crossing her threshold for the first time afterwards, and if she turneth not back the omen bodes well. When she is well clear of the house enter and bring away the five black cats you will find seated round the fire, and, for security, place them in the rood loft where they will be free from all spell or charm."

All this was duly enacted ere the coming of the Maid of the Golden Shoon was made public. There were many ready hands to assist with the fashioning of the bower, which was furnished with the best the village could offer in the way of decoration and comforts. On the day of its completion, and as the village girls were returning after decorating the bower with flowers, they discovered a poor beggar girl sitting on the root of a fallen tree seemingly exhausted and weeping. Their hearts went out to her, and when the young smith came up and saw the stranger's distress, he tenderly lifted her up in his arms and assured her his mother would tend her till she was well enough to continue her journey. As he held her in his arms her ragged cape fell to the ground disclosing a plump white arm encircled by a band of gold set with precious jewels, whilst, dangling from beneath her tattered skirt, were seen a pair of tiny feet shod in dazzling shoes. They had not long to wait for confirmation of what they already suspected, for, when the handsome young smith set down his burden in his amazement, the supposed beggar girl burst into a merry peal of laughter, threw back the mass of golden hair from her face and shapely shoulders,

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cast away her rags, shook down her silken skirt, and stood before them a picture of loveliness—the Maid of the Golden Shoon ! The smith was full of apologies for having dared to take her in his arms, but she only laughed and said : “ May I never rest against a heart less true than thine. A proclamation has gone forth that the first truly honourable knight who shall fulfil certain conditions, some of which you already know, shall claim me as his bride ; till then, good smith, I dub thee as my squire.” Further, she told the little group that she was the Lady Winifreda, and informed her squire how he should act when any knight arrived to take up her gage. Then she retired to the bower which had been prepared for her, and those who had just completed it returned to the village. It was not long after that a knight with squires and retainers clattered into the village on their heavy war horses. As though expecting to find other knights already at Ingleby, one of the squires announced on the village green that the gallant for whom he spake :

Would break a lance or bend a sword
With any knight who held his word
To be not worth the trusting.

Then was it the smith made answer : “ My Lady Winifreda’s gage is not one of battle or joust, but that in turn as knights who sought her hand arrived, they should meet her at the edge of a wood one by one on succeeding nights at twelve of the clock, till such time as the knight for whom she really sought came to her. The smith undertook to act as guide to the knight who claimed precedence, and duly took him that same evening.

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The Maid of the Golden Shoon, *alias* Lady Winifreda, met him at the appointed place, and, when the smith had departed, told him of all the evil the witches had done, and how this evil was like to continue unless she adopted the course which had been shown to her. It was, she explained, a trying ordeal for a maiden. She was to retire with the knight to a bower through which no ray of light could penetrate, and between the hour of midnight and one of the morning, was to change her clothes for his armour, he assisting her to don the latter. The armour must, if the combat against witchcraft was to be successful, never have been worn by a knight who had wilfully brought a blush of shame upon either maid or wife. "Sir Knight," she said, "can you, upon your solemn oath, say that you have never done so?"

Drawing his sword, the knight kissed both hilt and blade, and said: "By my patron, St Euphemia, who cast behind her all earthly passions, I swear that I have never wittingly brought flush to the cheek of either maid or wife."

"It is well," replied Winifreda, "but I would even yet read thee a warning from the Fairies' book so that thou mightest weigh well what thou undertakest to do. Harken to that which is written here:

Be true, brave knight, to thyself this night,
And then thou'llt be true to her.
Art thou as strong as thy heart's desire?
Canst thou sleek with thy will fierce passion's fire
Whilst her maid and her squire thou be?
If thine heart doth quail that thou mightest fail,
Enter not yon bower with her.

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For be't through thine eye, mind, or hand thou fall,
Thy life shall forfeit be. There will come to my call
One who will vanquish thee.

And so it was, though none knew how, that within a quarter of an hour after the knight had entered the bower he fled from it without his sword or armour, with head bent in shame—disgraced and conquered. A few lines of the old ballad are still remembered regarding this part of the legend :

No buckler, sword, or plumed head-piece,
No coat of mail he wore ;
With hanging head, slouched that untrue knight,
In a buckskin shirt and in sorry plight,
“ Oh, curse me yon maid ! ” he swore.

The failure of the first knight, and the evident disgrace attending that failure, came as a sad blow to the villagers. They had hoped for immediate deliverance, and when a second, a third, fourth, and even to the sixth, knight met with no better fate, their hearts and hopes began to fail. This was accentuated when it became generally known that for three nights in succession two other evil-faced hags had been seen to enter Black Meg's cottage. So perturbed and alarmed did the good folks become after the failure of the sixth candidate for the hand of Winifreda, the Maid of the Golden Shoon, that the smith and others set out, against their better judgment, and despite the explicit commands they had received regarding visiting the bower, to plead with Winifreda in her wood-land privacy to free them from the machinations of Meg, and to restore to them the lost children without waiting

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longer for the arrival of a knight worthy to aid her in the working of the original plan. Even as they approached the bower, however, they heard the Maid gently singing :

Within my bower six suits of mail,
As from me cast lie here.
Six broken lances strew the ground,
Six battered shields likewise are found,
Six broad swords 't doth appear.

.
This day shall come on a piebald steed,
With mane as white as snow ;
A knight who shall kiss my golden shoon,
Who shall hie to my bower when there is no moon,
And no ill in his soul shall grow.
I'll don his mail, he my maid shall be,
And my squire as well I trow.
In my — and gown, in my hood and cape

.
One charm of mine, 'gainst his knightly vow.

.
On bended knee we will plight our troth,
By the stone which the giant threw ;
And I, the Maid of the Golden Shoon,
Will bid him fare, when there is no moon,
To my bower, for I know he's true.

.
Taking this as a good omen they retraced their steps, and as they entered the village they beheld a handsome young knight seated upon a richly caparisoned piebald horse with snow-white mane. The maid, they found,

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had followed close in their wake ; so it came about that they witnessed the meeting of the twain. Quite sure were they that a slight blush deepened the colour of her lovely face as the knight advanced saluting. They were equally certain that a glad light shone from his eyes as he did so. That they were known to each other was evident, for he addressed her by her name, and she him as "Harold." Standing by the side of his charger she placed one dainty foot upon his hand, and next instant, with a light and fairy-like spring, she was in the saddle. Then followed the fulfilment of the prophecy, for the young knight took both her feet in his hands and kissed her golden shoes. . . . Those who had heard Winifreda's song now felt that all was well, and told their story to those who quickly gathered on the green. That day was given up to rejoicing and games, nor was there quiet on that green till night fell. Then Winifreda retired to her bower to pray for Heaven's blessing and the good offices of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour to attend her that night. Before leaving the excited throng, she had made arrangements for the smith to conduct Harold to the woodland, as he had done the other knights, an hour before the stroke of twelve. . . .

The supreme moment of her life had come. She had bidden to the privacy of her bower one she had secretly long and truly loved ; one whom she believed equally sincerely and purely loved her. He was shortly to undertake a task which would pass him through the refiner's fire—a task which only the really pure in heart and truly virtuous could venture upon with any hope of success. She knew full well that if she desired, she might take his

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hand and leave that bower without subjecting him to test or temptation ; but she also knew she had a mission, and that failure to carry it out would leave those to whom she had been sent as deliverer in the power of the three wicked hell-hags.

Well did Winifreda know that these same three witches would do everything in their power—and their influence for evil was terrible and mighty—to make her lover knight break all his good resolves and his oath, thus ruining the high hopes she had of the future. Winifreda felt that every temptation Black Meg and her associates could devise would that night assail her lover in all their most alluring and seductive forms. What if these evil machinations should succeed ? What if the hot passion of youth and the frailty of human nature succumbed in the presence of such influence in the bower ? What if but for an instant they caused but one unholy thought or desire to pass through Harold's soul ? For a brief moment the good resolutions warring within her almost yielded to the whispered impulse not to ask the knight to pass through the fire in which all his predecessors had been scorched. Then was it she cried : “ Perish the thought ! by Our Lady, if Harold be not true to his mother's teaching and the oath he must take, to his own knightly word and all I have thought of him, then he is not worthy to claim me as a bride. If so it be that I am called upon to sacrifice the great hope of my life for others, then so it *shall* be ! ”

And even as she uttered her resolution she heard the voices of those who were conducting Harold to her bower. The villagers stopped at a respectful distance and alone

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Harold advanced to the dark corner of the woodland falling gently to Winifreda to guide him.

As the smith and his companions entered the village they saw a light in the smithy, and there found assembled some of those who had been deputed to watch Black Meg's cottage. They gathered that the two strange flames, not of those parts, had been seen to enter the cottage carrying with them things of evil import. This was not an hour ago, and they had hastened to old Robby to inform him of this latest development and to learn from him what was best to be done to frustrate them. They were at that moment being instructed to lose no time in returning to Meg's cottage with three fast shoes fastened to a string; each shoe nine paces from the other and the string sufficiently long to encircle Meg's cottage. The ends were to be securely tied with a piece of rowan-tree ("wickenwood") within the knot. Once the cottage was encompassed with this magic circle, so Robby informed them, no one would be able either to enter or leave the house in which so much evil had been planned and wrought until the string was severed by Harold's sword, and only then should he succeed in passing unscathed the ordeal in front of him. As those entrusted with the circumventing and imprisoning of Meg and her unholy allies were nearing their destination, Harold, of noble birth and noble intent, was deftly fulfilling his dual part of squire and maid to his lady love. Their every movement, by magic art, was being keenly watched and commented upon by the three hags in Meg's kitchen.

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Standing around a small table, the trio were intently peering into a brazen bowl three parts full of some dark liquid, upon the bright surface of which they saw distinctly portrayed every action of Harold and Winifreda within the bower. As the villagers cautiously approached and began to encompass the cottage with their string, they heard one of the hags call out "Now! now!" and peeping through the window they saw hell's fire dart from her eyes and light up her contorted evil face. "Now! now!" shrieked one of the others, "now is our chance! Now, Meg, blind his soul with her naked charms. Quick, Meg! put upon him more than an angel could bide (bear). Toss the powder on the fire then he must fail and fall. Let our curse fall upon him and all who would dare come between us and our master: Curse him! Curse him! Curse him!" As the hags in turn repeated the words, Meg cast upon the fire a powder, which not only filled her kitchen with a dazzling blaze of light, but simultaneously lighted up Winifreda's bower with dazzling brilliancy. A peal of demoniacal laughter burst from the trio as they thus succeeded in thwarting all the care which had been expended in shutting out the faintest ray of light from breaking the privacy of the Maid of the Golden Shoon. So wild and unearthly was that fiendish peal that those without shuddered. Exultation, however, was short-lived, and gave place to a savage howl of anger and dismay as the hags saw that Harold was standing with his back to the Maid and with his eyes tightly closed. They felt how utterly they had been defeated, and how little they understood and underestimated real nobleness of character, true love, and

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chivalry. They realised their failure the more when they heard Harold bid Winifreda bind his eyes with her kerchief, and add: "Neither hell nor all the wicked witches on earth shall again put us to shame by such a foul trick. Fear not, I am here to guard thy honour, not even by thought to sully it, or glance to make thee blush."

"Oh, Harold!" replied Winifreda, "I could almost pray a blessing to fall upon those who would thus have wrought your destruction, and my eternal sorrow. Now I know that thou art worthy to be my lord and husband, and that together we shall bring confusion and death to those against whom I shall carry thy sword and gird myself in thy armour."

Frantic with growing despair, the hags strove by every evil device known to the Black Art to bring ruin upon the lovers, but all without avail. At daybreak nearly the whole of the villagers foregathered at the entrance to the wood, and from every throat came a joyous cheer the moment they beheld Winifreda mounted on Harold's piebald riding towards them. At the first glance they had hardly recognised her in her lover's armour, which, by magic charm, had shrunk as Harold had fastened each buckle, until it fit with perfect ease and grace her shapely form, for all the world as though it had been fashioned for her by the king's armourer himself. Casting her eye over those assembled, she beckoned the smith to her and asked if all those in health and able of body from the village were present. On hearing that this was not so she demanded:

"Knowest thou the reason for their absence?"
"I beg my lady not to press for an answer," replied the

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smith. "As thou lovest truth, good smith," insisted Winifreda, "hide nothing from me." "As my lady will, then," answered the smith. "There be some who have spoken ill of thee, but they see evil in all things. They have spoken lightly of thy honour in connection with the secret meetings in the bower." "They shall account for their words later," said the Maid, "we have other more serious work on hand at the moment. Here comes Sir Harold and the six recreant knights, who have humbled themselves before him. . . . Hearken ye, false knights—false to your honour, to your oath, and to a defenceless maiden—to each has been returned his sword and armour so that ye might make some atonement. Ye are now to be led in front of Black Meg's cottage. There, within a circle I shall draw, will ye fight with hellish things, that the death which the god of battle has ordained shall be yours, may be a penance which will wipe away the stain of dishonour now upon you. Quit yourselves at this last like men, after Sir Priest here hath given you absolution; your penance hath already been laid upon you by other than Holy Church."

One by one the priest heard the confessions of the erring knights, and then, turning her steed about, the Maid of the Golden Shoon led the way towards Meg's cottage, first telling the smith to bring his hammer with him and a winding-sheet,¹ both of which, she said, might or might not be needed. Winifreda, on nearing the cottage, bid the villagers keep their distance. Harold led the six knights within a few yards of the door, up to which the Maid boldly rode. Dismounting, she struck the

¹ Shroud.

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wall of the cottage on the left side of the doorway, and, with Harold's sword point, scratched a wide semi-circle upon the ground fully thirty yards in diameter and ending on the right of the door. She then bade Harold lead the six knights within the circle and retire beyond the charmed enclosure. The instant he had stepped over the line Winifreda severed the string, which had been drawn round the cottage, with Harold's sword, calling in a commanding voice: "Come forth, ye beldames, and you, Sir Knights, be ready, and, as far as may be, retrieve your tarnished honour." Though freed by the severing of the mystic bonds around the house, which erstwhile had held the occupants prisoners, there was no response to the command, and again did Winifreda call to those within: "D'ye hear me, ye vile hags of darkness? Come forth, ye workers of evil, to your deserts!"

But the door opened not; neither was there the least sign of any living thing within. "Smith," said Winifreda, "bring hither thy hammer. Tie about thy apron a girdle of the charmed string which has the knot and wickenwood within it, and then break open yonder door." The first blow which the smith gave smashed the door to atoms and shook the old cottage to its very foundations. Still there was neither sound nor sign of life. When, however, the winding-sheet was set ablaze and Winifreda threw within it a bunch of kirkyard yarrow and grave moss, and the burning shroud was thrust within the cottage, the effect was instantaneous. With loud roars, which made the very ground to tremble and struck the villagers dumb and spell-bound, there came crawling forth three fierce, fire-spitting dragons. Thrice in size

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did they swell the moment they passed through the doorway into the open and faced the six knights. "Two to each dragon!" cried Winifreda . . . and then began a combat, the like of which the oldest inhabitant standing without the battle circle had only heard spoken of, and then with bated breath.

Whilst blood and slime bespattered the ground, stenching fumes and deadly flames were emitted from the terrible jaws of the fierce hell dragons, unearthly sounds filling the air. With all their might the knights fought—fought as they had never been called upon to do before. Dreadful was it to watch the fury of the dragons, the lashing of their tails, the clashing of their jaws as their teeth met, and their writhing contortions. Terrible, too, was it to hear their angry roars of pain as, time and time again, a lance reached some vital point. Then was it that from their dilated nostrils rushed deadly and poisonous fumes and flames and sprays of slime, which scorched the foliage all around. At last, one dragon, having slain its two assailants, was about to lend its aid to one of the others. During all this time Harold had remained at Winifreda's side. Neither had uttered a word, but the instant the second knight fell and the hideous conqueror was about to turn upon one of the others, Winifreda, still holding Harold's sword, boldly stepped within the charmed circle, and, with one brave thrust, drove the sword through the dragon's eye, deep within its brain. As she drew it forth again, she noticed that Harold had followed her, and, unarmed, was standing by her side.

"Back! back! Harold," she cried, "ere you are

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sprinted with some of the slime during the death fickings (struggles). Did but one drop touch you it would leave an open sore no leech could ever heal, no balm could ever soothe." Back they both leaped over the magic line, but scarcely had they done so ere a second dragon gained the victory over its foes. Again did Winifreda rush in, declining to hand the sword to Harold, with the simple words, "Not yet, it may not be." Again Harold attended her, and again, with a dexterity which was truly marvellous, Winifreda drove the sword deep into the brain of the loathsome creature. When they had returned to safety the Maiden said: "Harold, to thee, my brave knight, falls the hardest task of all. Take thy sword, and when the sixth falls, spring into the ring and smite off the dragon's head with one blow. Strike at the narrow part of its neck, and may Our Lady and the God of Battle guide thy blade." A few moments later she whispered, "Now is your chance; go!" As she uttered these words the last knight fell, and Harold immediately sprang into the circle. Boldly he approached the evil-looking reptile which met him open-mouthed and blood-stained. It swayed its body from side to side and darted its head hither and thither with bewildering swiftness. Harold remained as cool, as quick and alert, as though he were taking part in a tourney; but now at long last Winifreda was all the woman. In armour she stood a trembling maid, her breast rising and falling, and wringing her hands in very anguish of soul lest her lover should fail and fall in his attempt to carry out the injunctions written in the Fairies' book. . . . But Harold was aided by more than his own bravery and agility, and his

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adversary was soon laid low at his feet. There was a roar of delight from the little crowd who had watched the combat, but above it rose the voice of Winifreda calling to her lover to hasten from the spot. As he did so the whole of the ground within the circle began to heave as though lifted by the back of some rising monster. Higher and yet higher it rose; then, with a crack the earth opened, swallowing the home of Black Meg and all trace of the mutilated supernatural forms she and her evil accomplices had assumed. There was a feeling of intense relief when the crater closed and it was realised by all that there was an end for ever of the evil influence amongst them. Still greater joy was yet to come, for Winifreda addressed the villagers and said with tears in her voice: "You mothers and fathers who have lost your little ones hasten to the church, and there, in the rood loft, near to the Redeeming Sign, will you find your babes, restored and even now calling for you."

There was a stampede for the church, and a few minutes later joyous shouts greeted the ears of Winifreda and Harold, who had followed. With their infants clasped to their breasts, mothers were now laughing, now weeping, and all were in a transport of delight when they met the beaming heroine of the day. Waiting till the first flush of jubilation had passed, Winifreda called for silence, and then said: "There is yet one measure of justice left for us to dispense. Bring hither those who have not joined with us this day in all we have passed through, and who sought to find evil in me and to defame me for carrying out the task laid upon me for your deliverance." When those of slanderous tongue were dragged

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to the kirkyard cross, the Maid, looking upon them with contempt, said :

“These are they who defamed me as an immoral wench. Now here, before you all, they shall be judged out of their own mouths. Sir Harold, take this thrice blessed cross upon my beads and touch the lips of these backbiters with it. Then will they be compelled here, before Sir Priest and all of you, to confess every mortal sin which they have committed these twelve months gone this day. We shall soon hear how much they really value purity, and whether they be fit to speak the name of any true maiden, let alone to defame as they have so often done.” No sooner did Harold touch the lips of the first with the crucifix than, as if speaking in a dream, there came such a story of ignominy and shame as surprised all. And so it was with each in turn when their tongues were loosed and their restraint removed. When they had finished their confessions and for ever disgraced themselves, Winifreda bid them depart and hide themselves from all honest folk.

Thus happily ends the legend of “The Maid of the Golden Shoon.” Doubtless Winifreda and Sir Harold were speedily married ; doubtless, too, the Fairy Queen and all her satellites attended the nuptials and gave their benediction both to the wedding and all the wedded life of those who came to the rescue of the sorely tried villagers at Ingleby Greenhow. Of all this, however, the legend tells us nothing.

Appendix

My late father added the following speculation and information to the foregoing legend :—

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There still remain one or two points of interest which the reader may care to know. There is some ground for suspecting that the whole story, in its earliest form, was that of a ballad romance. The few lines herein given, with the addition of a few others, were dictated from memory by Bessy Ellis to the Vicar or Curate-in-charge of either Lastingham or Cropton. There is little doubt this was done about the year 1815. It is quite evident that, whoever took down Bessy's dictation, altered the quaint speech of that lady into the everyday English as spoken by the writer. We have much to thank the rev. gentleman for, but, in so doing, he made a terrible and irreparable mistake. Some few years later, the MS. of these lines was lent to one Robert Cooper, mine host of the "Crown," Hutton-in-the-Hole, who seems to have been a bit of a poet. Anyway, he was at that time writing, or the possession of the MS. prompted him to write, a Mell Act, and, as many of Bessy's lines as he could work into his own production, he very readily availed himself of, and interpolated. This harvest supper act, when complete, comprised some six hundred lines. It was arranged for five characters, and entitled, *The Test of Honour*. It may be here mentioned that, throughout his composition, no difficulty existed in picking out the lines which he had taken from the Ellis MS., his being so very inferior from every point. Either his MS. or a copy of the *Test of Honour* was given by Bessy to Mr Scorer, and was enacted by him and his friends at several Mell suppers in the dales. But when, after many years, this MS. was lent to the writer, it had for so long been considered of so little value that many of the lines were quite undecipherable, pictures having been pasted on many of the leaves. Others were badly torn, many gone altogether, and almost everywhere were to be found the marks of undoubted genius in possession of a penny box of water-colours. With such materials as have been obtainable, the writer has put together the story of "The Maid of the Golden Shoon."

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One is struck with the applicability to the frail knights of a Latin inscription on a vase at the entering of Ray Wood, Castle Howard, which, being translated (as they were some years ago by a guest) read :

Diana rules within these sylvan shades,
But shares her kingdom with the queen of Love ;
By day the huntress roams amid the glades,
By night her rival goddess deigns to move.
Fear not, O gentle maiden, here to rest,
Chaste Diana rules when shines the orb of day,
But quit these verdant groves and homeward haste
When night and Venus hold their lawless sway.
*O trust not youth in night's unhallowed hours,
Howe'er impassioned his perfidious strain ;
Love laughs at vows, breathed in nocturnal bowers,
Beneath the sway of Venus and her train.*





viii. *Elphi the Dwarf and*
Siba the Good

The fairy-folk, the hobmen, the elves, and good and bad dwarfs all seem to have stuck tenaciously to the seclusion and fastnesses of the hills when the march of modern materialistic times, with their artificiality and supercilious unbelief, has driven them from less insular parts. There is greater simplicity and more truth ; more inherent faith and less superior scepticism amid the everlasting hills. So is it that I have heard old folks in the northern dales and their heathery hill-tops speak of fairies, hobmen, and all their kindred and attendant sprites, not merely with complete conviction, but with an ease almost bordering upon intimacy. That generation has gone, and with it a wealth of poetic lore.

Many of the traditional stories of hobmen and other allied elf-folk have been told so often and of so many widely divergent localities—an interesting fact in itself—as to have become hackneyed. With that of Elphi, the Farndale dwarf, however, it is different. *Imprimis*: the story is more complete in narrative and detail ; it is old yet new, and was remembered by only a few half a century ago. My late father prefaces the version of the arresting legend, with its strong moral setting and picturesque

Elphi the Dwarf and Siba the Good

dressing, which he was able to secure, with the following note :—

In the early days of the nineteenth century the hostess of the Little Fox and Hounds Inn at Orra (or Urra), in Bilsdale, told the following story (one of the best of its kind of all those I have been able to collect) to a wedding party staying the night under her roof :

“ My story begins in the good old way ‘ Once upon a time,’ and that was I can’t tell you how long ago, but it was when the land hereabouts was owned by a great nobleman for whom there was no great love and who his tenants only saw when he came a-hunting. His steward, one Master Mott, fell desperately in love with a young maiden, the stepdaughter of a widow woman who lived upon a small farm near to Castleton. Rosa—that was her name—had given her hand and heart to young Rob Ainsley, who lived on the adjoining holding. It happened that both the widow and young Ainsley were in arrears with their rent, and at the yearly audit Rob had begged Master Mott to give him time so that he might pay in full. This, however, had been refused by the steward, and there was a strong suspicion in the locality that to serve his own ends with Rosa, Mott was anxious to drive Rob out of the neighbourhood. With a heart weighed down with forebodings of evil to come, Ainsley hastened to tell Rosa of Mott’s threat to ‘ sell him up, lock, stock, and barrel,’ unless his indebtedness was paid within a week. This was a demand with which the young fellow was quite unable to comply—a fact which the steward well knew.

“ Rob found his sweetheart busy at her wheel, and con-

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cluded his sorrowful tale by saying : ‘ It means that we must part, and it may be years before I can offer you a home. So, though it breaks my heart to say it, it is only fair to you that I offer you your freedom.’

“ ‘ Aye, aye, it’s a great pity,’ said the stepmother ; ‘ but you have acted like a man. It would be a shame, as things have turned out, for you to hold Rosa to her promise. You’ll both soon get over the parting, and then Rosa will mend her fortune, and mine too, by marrying money. Poverty is a dreadful thing, and a family of hungry bairns soon drains the cup of love dry.’

“ Rosa never lifted her eyes from her wheel, nor did she utter one single word. At last Rob took up his cap and bade the stepmother ‘ good-bye.’ He then turned to Rosa, whom he felt had failed him in his hour of trial, just when he most needed her love and sympathy, and a word of trust and hope for the future. ‘ Good-bye, Rosa,’ he said, ‘ you’ll at least wish me God-speed and shake hands with me ? ’

“ Then Rosa lifted her eyes to his and he saw that they were wet with tears. Rising from her wheel she took up her hood saying, ‘ I will set you a little way.’

“ ‘ Rosa ! ’ exclaimed the stepmother, ‘ I bid you to your wheel. Wish thy old sweetheart God-speed here and now.’

“ ‘ I will to my wheel when I return,’ replied Rosa firmly, as the lovers left the house.

“ When they had closed the fold-yard gate Rosa put her arm through Rob’s and whispered : ‘ You have offered me my freedom, but no man save you shall ever call me wife.’ When Rob had released the maiden from his

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loving embrace she told him that she was certain, from what she had heard pass between them, that her step-mother and Mott were in league for no good purpose. She felt convinced that the steward had made some offer to forgive the rent which was owing, and make a reduction in the future if the old woman would only persuade Rosa to give Rob up and look with favour upon him.

“ Again clasping Rosa to his heart, Rob declared : ‘ I will find our noble landlord and tell him my indebtedness. Surely he will not be so hard as his steward and will give me the time for which I ask to pay. Then I will return, my darling, and we will get married in spite of everything and everybody.’ ”

“ ‘ Bravely spoken ! spoken like a man !—a very young man, too, and one who loves a love with a love that loves ! Ha ! ha ! he ! he ! ho ! ho ! ’ came from a queer, misshapen, bandy-legged, hump-backed dwarf sitting cross-legged on a boulder quite close to the lovers, but whose presence neither of them had hitherto noticed. ‘ Oh you young men and maidens, how you *do* talk to be sure ! I saw him kiss you, my pretty maid ! Well, I don’t blame him ! I don’t, indeed I don’t. There, don’t mind me, I’m only a little crumpled-legged cripple. I’m nobody, not worth a thought—not worth a thought,’ he repeated sorrowfully. Their look of amazement on discovering that they were not alone tickled his sense of humour, and he burst into another fit of laughter, so infectious that both Rob and Rosa joined in his merriment. ‘ That’s better,’ said the little man in the green cap, wiping his eyes so full of kindly light.

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‘ I like to hear young folk laugh, though yours, sad to say, will be of short duration, but remember :

Though the loudest laugh oft foreruns sorrow,
Yet the tears of to-day may bring joy on the
morrow.’

“ ‘ Aye ! ’ sighed Rosa, ‘ ’tis true we *are* very sad.’

“ ‘ I know that,’ replied the dwarf, ‘ and your to-morrow for joy will not be yet ; but it *will* come, if only you do that which is right. . . . Not what most of your friends would consider right, but the right which balances with truth in the scales of justice ; and that, too, when all earthly things seem slipping away from you. . . . I know what has happened, and I know, too, something of what *will* be. Now listen : My name is Elphi.’ At this both Rob and Rosa started, for many a time had they heard of the power and kindly deeds of Elphi, the Farndale Dwarf, and of his mother, who was always spoken of as ‘ Siba the Good.’ Elphi continued : ‘ I am the Dwarf of the moors. Of my mother, I am sure, you have often heard. Never son had a better mother than I have been blest with. She it is who has sent me to give you comfort. She has done more ! She has sent you both a present of four things, three of which you must plant and cherish in your hearts, the fourth you will wear with your beads round your necks and guard with your lives.

“ ‘ Firstly, then, never forget that true goodness is not always outwardly beautiful.

“ ‘ Secondly, the shortest path is not always the easiest to travel.

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“Thirdly, when you say that truth is truth, strive to be all that truth is and means. You, Rob, always bear in mind that truth ever walks arm in arm with honour, justice, and mercy. You, my dear maiden, never forget that truth ever holds over a maiden the pure white canopy of virtue and modesty. It is a protection from the penetrating rays of vanity and the tempter’s whisperings. These often say: “Do, there is little harm”; whilst modesty, owing to the noisy clamour of vanity, can hardly be heard breathing a caution in the other ear: “Don’t! for the seed of folly once planted often bears the fruit of a great sin.” You must both remember that the road to evil opens out through fair portals and is easy to travel. At first there are steps of polished marble—but they lead downward. They are strewn with flowers of the brightest hues and sweet alluring odours; crystal fountains play on either side, and birds with dazzling plumage and thrilling notes fill the air with voluptuous songs. There is luscious fruit, full ripe by the wayside, inviting the weary traveller to tarry and sleek his thirst with their rich, sensuous juices. . . . But if that traveller tires of all the gaudy tinsel, the hollow chimera and make-believe which he eventually finds at root and core, and if he would retrace his steps! Then he discovers the marble steps have crumbled, the hanging fruit has fallen rotten to the ground; the fountains no longer send forth crystal streams, and the water about them stands stagnant and fungus-grown, their basins are filthy, fit only for blighted, tarnished souls to bend their parched lips over. There is everywhere desolation and remorse—the gaudy tinsel has

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tarnished, for it lacked truth and would not stand the test of time or the refiner's fire.

“ ‘To you, Rosa, I give this piece of silver. It once rested upon the breast of the Blessed St Hilda, and there oft touched the crucifix she wore in life and death. Let it rest near thine own young heart, and prize it as thou hast hitherto done thine own pure virtue. It will guide thee always when thine own untutored judgment might lead thee astray.

“ ‘To thee, Rob, I give a chip from the sandal of King Egfrid (? Ecgfrid), whose footsteps in this life trod in holiness. It will assist *thee* to walk aright. To-morrow morning make arrangements with some trusted friend for the disposal of all your belongings, and let him settle so far as possible with Mott. Be patient, always remembering that success takes bye-paths astride of a great double-trotting horse, whilst failure prances before the eyes of all seated upon a gambalding horse. To-morrow towards the setting of the sun, you and your lady-love will meet at Ralph's Cross and there plight your troth afresh. Then you will part—and there must be no turning back. You, Rob, will start your journey by way of White Cross and make for the cross which stands at Lastingham. There say an Ave Maria for guidance. . . . And what about you, Rosa? Go ye home and, as far as right and truth allow, be dutiful. You will be watched over.’

“The day following, Rob did all the dwarf had commanded, and in the evening he and Rosa parted; parted with the shadow of the Redeeming Sign

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falling upon them as their lips met in a last long embrace.

“It was a glorious sunset, and many a time Rob cast his eyes back over the regal robe of purple heather and waved his hand to that sad figure weeping by the cross with something of the anguish with which another once wept at Calvary. As the maiden and Ralph’s still-standing landmark merged into one, the sun sank and left Rob alone. When in sight of Rosedale Abbey he sat down with a boulder at his back to await the coming of the day. The wondrous and most merciful balm to troubled minds—the God-given gift of sleep—came to him, and when he awoke he noticed a young hound coming towards him at full gallop. When within a few yards of him a hare sprang from its form in a tussock of benty-grass, and at the sight of it the hound dropped something it had been carrying in its jaws and went in pursuit. Both were soon out of sight, and picking up its erstwhile burden Rob discovered it was an odd-looking leather wallet, so hard as to give the impression that it had been buried many years and become almost petrified in the peaty soil. When at last Rob succeeded in turning out the contents, there lay in his hands five massive gold rings, each richly set with the largest gems he had ever seen. In his amazement and delight his thoughts became articulate, and he said: ‘My troubles are ended. If I say nothing of my find to anyone and offer these to a goldsmith in York he will surely give me sufficient to wed Rosa and live like a nobleman. This, indeed, is a short cut to fortune.’ As these words were uttered one of the rings dropped, and in stooping to recover it

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Elphi's talisman about his neck seemed to burn his breast, and he recalled that the dwarf had said: 'The shortest path is not always the easiest to travel.' His duty then became clear. He must try and find the owner of the rings. So, first burying the treasure which he felt it would not be safe for him to carry, he set about to inquire at Rosedale Abbey, at Lastingham, and from folk whom he met hailing from Kirbymoorside, Pickering, and Whitby way, if they had ever heard of any, either noble or gentle, who had lost a wallet containing jewels.

"His inquiries were unavailing, so he turned his steps towards the cross at Lastingham and there bent his knee in prayer. As he rose he saw a horsewoman approaching him, and was struck by the ease and grace with which she controlled her spirited mount. In person she was young, strikingly beautiful, and possessing a perfect figure. When she drew rein, however, Rob felt that her very blushes and the coyness of her downcast eyes were but acting, and when she begged him lift her from the saddle and almost threw herself into his arms he was both amazed and startled. Saying she was anxious for a few moments' conversation with him the maiden gathered the skirts of her flowing habit over her arm showing rather more of her shapely ankles than Rob felt sure his modest Rosa would have done. Seating herself upon the grassy bank some little distance from the cross, this mysterious lady beckoned Rob to sit by her side.

"'Now we are quite comfortable,' she said (giving him a bewitching smile with a semblance of shyness). 'So let me explain why I have sought you, a perfect stranger. . . . I need your aid! My name is Elba—my

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story is a sad one. A few short months ago—a lifetime it seems to me—I was a free, happy maiden. To save my father from dishonour and a dungeon I became the wife of as cruel and vile a wretch as ever breathed. This man, who calls me “wife,” is rarely sober, and ’twas but yesterday, and not for the first time, he struck me. . . . Look!’ she cried, almost in tears as she uncovered her shoulder and pointed to a crimson scar reaching to her snow-white bosom. ‘The instant I was free from his cruel clutch I hastened to the wise seer, who bade me rise with the sun and come hither to meet with one like myself in sore trouble who would succour me.’

“‘But *how*? in what way can *I* aid thee, lady?’ asked Rob, fascinated by the beauty of her who had tickled his vanity by reposing her confidences in him.

“‘I will explain,’ she continued, ‘though that which I have in my mind may give thee pain. Open not thy lips, however, till I bid thee speak, though what I say may shock thee. Remember it is a cruelly-treated and broken-hearted woman who unburdens her very soul to thee.’ Pausing for a moment as though she found it difficult to express her feelings, the lady then continued: ‘Since I first saw thee a year ago my heart hath treasured thy image—Hush! I know what is on thy tongue; that I am a wedded woman and that thine own heart is already given to another. But listen: thou lovest one as faithless to thee as my brute husband is faithless to me. The wiseman bade me wait after I had met thee till three crows companying together should fly overhead towards witchheld Yaudwath, between Hutton-le-Hole

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and Kirbymoorside, at which sign he would, by magic spell, transport us both in spirit to some spot, I know not where or how, but where thou would'st see for thyself that the girl thou so fully trusts is but a jade unworthy of thy love, and where I should have still further proof of my husband's infidelity. . . . Look! here come the three crows!

"And, as the dark omens of evil passed overhead, a cloud of inky blackness seemed to obscure the sun, there was a mystic sound as of a sudden moment-long tempest sweeping through a forest, and Rob found himself standing within a few yards of Rosa's home. He saw quite plainly the girl whom he loved in conversation with a stranger, whom she was eagerly offering to accompany. He saw the stranger press her to his breast and kiss her, and then lift her into the pillion on a horse he had waiting. Mounting in front of her the twain rode away, and as they vanished from his sight he found himself again seated by his mysterious companion. He could not speak, he could not understand, his heart and mind were seething with doubt and jealousy. He bowed his head and wept as do men rarely.

" 'I understand what a broken heart is,' whispered the lady, 'and I, too, have cause for tears. . . . The man with whom you saw your Rosa so readily ride away is my husband! There, rest thy head in my lap, and let the tears flow on, they ease the sorrow of a deceived heart. She never loved thee as I have and *do* love thee. Only help me and I will do and dare anything for thy sake. I am thy slave.'

"Rob Ainsley was startled at these impassioned words.

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He had an inner consciousness that he was being cajoled by a wily temptress, and this was made all the clearer when she suggested that he should enter her service nominally as manservant until my lord ended his days in some drunken debauch, and then entirely fill his place.

“On hearing this Rob sprang to his feet, throwing aside the hand that stroked his hair. ‘Hush! hush!’ he said; ‘go thy way, lady, and forget that we have ever met.’

“When Elba realised she had failed, she too sprang to her feet, and livid with passion, exclaimed: ‘Low-bred dolt! Quickly shalt thou learn the cost of a woman’s unrequited love.’ Vaulting into the saddle she galloped away, lashing her horse at every stride it took.

“Elba had only just disappeared from view when an old, old woman approached and introduced herself by saying: ‘I am Siba, the mother of the misshapen Elphi. . . . I cursed the day when he was born, but I have more often since thanked the Giver of all Good for the blessing he so disguised. Well! Elphi has just told me that thou and the abandoned Elba have been having quite a long conversation. My son said: “If Rob withstands the blandishments of the wicked wife of the brutal Golpha, as I feel sure he will, then Elba will hasten home to swear to her jealous husband that she has been assaulted whilst out riding. Then will Golpha order out his hounds and have one of the man-hunts he so much enjoys.” My son has sent me to save thee from being thus hunted and from what would happen to thee when captured.’

“‘You speak fair, mother,’ said Rob, bewildered with

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the series of strange happenings ; ‘ but by what token am I to know that thou art the mother of Elphi ? ’

“ ‘ I praise thy caution, but it would have been more to thy credit, my son, had’st thou shown something of it with the beautiful designing Elba ; but I won’t upbraid thee, for the blood runs hot in young veins, and thou did’st cast off the worthless jade. I would remind thee again though that real goodness is not always outwardly beautiful. Sad, indeed, would have been thy fate had’st thou yielded to the wiles of Golpha’s wife. . . . But come ! ’

“ Over hill and dale they hurried, and barely had they crossed the threshold of the dame’s moorland cot when Elphi entered breathless and excited.

“ ‘ Quick ! ’ said the little chap ; ‘ there is not a moment to lose. Elba has done as I feared, and even now I can hear the baying of the hounds in pursuit. We must throw them off the scent. Off with your shoes and put these upon your feet,’ throwing Rob another pair. ‘ Now follow me.’ Rob hurried after his little friend towards the banks of the River Dove (now famed for the seas of golden daffodils which each spring for miles hug its sides). To a curious natural cave under the bed of the tortuous stream between Douthwaite Dale and Farndale, Elphi escorted the young fellow, and there bade him bide. ‘ I must away to see that no harm comes to my mother or our home. Relentless as Golpha is, and mad as he often grows with passion, I do not think he dare harm my mother—he fears her too much ! But wait till I return and you shall know all.’

“ In an hour or so the little dwarf reappeared in the

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cave and Rob at once saw that something dreadful had happened. Great tears rolled down Elphi's wizened cheeks as he related that his mother had gone. 'I was wrong,' he said, 'Golpha has dared to drag her to the castle as a prisoner, and our little home is now a heap of smoking ruins. Come with me; I must hasten to our good friend the seer who lives at the foot of Black Howe, hard by Keldy Castle, he can make clear that which is passing.'

"When they had crossed the moor for about a mile, Elphi suddenly turned his face towards the sun, and uttering a peculiar call, hummed in a low, soft voice, almost like that of a mother wooing sleep for her babe :

‘Wings of purple, blue, and gold,
Shimmering, sheeny, instant flight ;
Ye swift dragons of the moor,
I crave your aid in my sore plight.
Whirring, whizzing, lightning flash,
From stars your jewels came ;
Moonlight, sunlight, both are ye,
Come, ye wings of magic flame ;
Come ! in countless thousands come !
My instant bidding do this day ;
Sorely do I need your help—
Come, ye dragons, come I pray.’

"At the conclusion of the dwarf's rhythmic plea there came a whizzing and whirring from every quarter of moor and hill-top, countless myriads of bright-hued dragon-flies. Such a scene never had mortal eyes beheld. Almost before the bewildered sense of sight could

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visualise what was happening, as far as the eye could reach there lay spread over the purple heather a brilliant, blinding, blaze of quivering iridescent, ever-changing colour. It was as if in an instant the moor had been covered with a vast carpet of scintillating gems. On bush and gorse, bracken, moss, and boulder it lay—a quivering mass of lovely, living light. The instant Elphi raised his hand, as if by the touch of a magic wand, every wing was folded, and the dazzling fairy scene of a moment ago was changed to one of sombre hue. Then was it Rob realised that what he had always heard regarding the magic powers of Elphi were not exaggerated. The little man addressed the strange army with something of the authority of a general. He said :

“ ‘ Flying Aithers, I command you to make known to the adders and askers that it is my wish that, at sunrise to-morrow, they go in their thousands and conceal themselves near to wicked Gotha’s castle. Tell ye every hornet and wasp, and all winged things with stings and venom, I need their aid there at that time. Tell them to gather there in their thousands. Go ye to the bustards, and bid them in my name to hie to the ant-hills and convey upon their backs every ant from these five moors. Let the queen of each anthill know she must assemble her armies in readiness. Tell one and all that the life of my mother, Siba the Good, who hath always been their friend, is in danger. One and all must take the flight of the ravens as their guide when the red sun rises. Now begone ! waste not a moment ! ’

“ Then again, as if by magic, the moor became one vast blaze of moving kaleidoscopic coloured light, as the

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myriads of wings began to quiver and rise. A moment later they had vanished on their mission.

“Addressing Rob, Elphi then said: ‘Now then, I am going to try the muscles of thy legs. The boots thou wearest will stand thee in good stead.’ With this he started off at an amazing pace for one so small and misshapen. By short cuts they went, over bogs with their seductive green covering, which Rob dare not have attempted to cross had it not been for his guide and the power which he felt his magic boots gave him. Through valleys and over hills; on, on, they went, those little legs never seeming to slacken pace or tire. At last their long journey ended and fortune was with them, for they found ‘the wiseman,’ as he was called for miles around, was at home. Indeed, he said he had been expecting them. Elphi explained his errand—that he wished to be given a view of his mother and her surroundings.

“‘I would have saved thee a heart’s pang,’ replied the seer, ‘but maybe it is better thou should’st have thy way. This I can tell thee, up to the present thy mother hath received no hurt; she is even now about to be judged. Come into the inner chamber that ye may both gaze upon the shield. Speak not so much as a whisper or the picture will vanish beyond recall. Pulling aside a hanging skin the old man revealed a shield, the brightness of which was that of burnished silver in the sunlight. Dipping a lighted taper within a brazen bowl standing beneath the shield a blinding flash, piercing as lightning on the darkest night, filled the cave, and that instant both cave and shield seemed to vanish and the trio found themselves standing in the large hall of Golpha’s castle. They saw Elba by

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the side of her lord, and near to her stood Mott, the steward, all smiles. Old Siba was being hurried forward towards the front of Golpha's dais. Then Elba stood up and said :

“ ‘ I was riding abroad at sunrise this morn to woo the roses back to my cheeks to please my lord, when a young man craved alms. As I was about to relieve him he most grievously assaulted me, and would have dragged me from the saddle had I not galloped away. When thou, my lord, would have caught and punished this scoundrel, Siba, the old witch-hag there, whom I know to be a vile old drab, spirited the knave away, and now refuses to disclose where he hideth. As she hath robbed my lord's hounds of their prey and me of vengeance, I claim that she be whipped and then hunted till she be ready to tell where the molester of your lordship's wife lieth.’ ”

“ ‘ The plan pleased cruel Golpha well. ‘ She shall, my dear,’ agreed he, ‘ and to-morrow at sunrise we will end her foul existence. I, who hold power over life and death, order that she be tied to a stake upon the moor, and there burnt for a witch. Ho ! ho ! good mother, it will be sport indeed to hear thy cries and see thy leatherned skin crinkle and wrinkle more than it is now. Hast aught to say, thou skinny, toothless hag ? ’ ”

“ ‘ I warn ye to have a care how ye work your wicked revenge upon this old body,’ said Siba. ‘ Remember, an' you spill but one drop of my blood, it shall bring a speedy reckoning upon ye, drunken sot, as well as upon thee, debauched, wicked, and lying jade, whom Golpha calleth wife, but who treateth him as the dolt he is and tricketh him every day.’ ”

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“As Siba uttered this daring denunciation, Elba, overcome with passion, snatched a heavy riding-whip from Mott’s hand, and, springing towards the old dame with the ferocity of a wild cat, belaboured her, Golpha roaring with laughter the while. At last one severe stroke drew blood from Siba’s hand. ‘You’ve done it!’ cried Siba, shaking a few drops on her assailant and then upon both Golpha and Mott. ‘Strike away, you sullied cuckold of a wife, no earthly power can save the three of you now. My warm red blood is upon you, and keener wounds than any in the castle kennels will hunt you by it. It lays upon you as my curse—the curse of one who loves blessing more than cursing; of one who warned you what your fate would be.’

“Instantly the picture faded away; total darkness fell upon them for a while, and then they found themselves back in the seer’s cave. Again the light flashed as before and another picture presented itself. Rob found himself gazing into a strongly barred room in which Rosa sat alone weeping. Then the door was unlocked and Golpha appeared and said: ‘I have come to have just one more peep at my lovely Rose. . . . But, by Our Lady, why those tears?’ Seating himself on the rush bed beside her, he would have wound his arm around her waist had not Rosa sprung up, saying: ‘Leave me, I pray. I never wish to see thy evil face again; it frights me. Kill me if you will, but till then leave me to my prayers.’

“And then Rob was compelled to listen to Golpha proposing shameful terms and inducements, offered to his lady-love as the price of her freedom, all of which Rosa treated as a frightened fawn would hear the baying

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of the unleashed hounds. At last the baron tired of what he saw was a fruitless effort. Rising, he said: 'Were it not that I could take by force the sweet honey from the rose when I will, I would not stop to parley with thee, my little spitfire wench. But hark ye! if the serving-man who brings thy evening meal hath not an answer from thee which pleases me, I will to-morrow, after old hag Siba is burned, strip every rag from off thy body, turn thee on the moor, and, when the glass hath half run, let out my hounds. 'Twill be more fun than hunting yon leg-weary witch. . . . and what a prize 'twill be to look upon when taken! The shapely Rosa—with never even a shift upon her—all hot with blushes and the chase, and scratched and torn with broom and briars! Of a truth I know not which I would rather have—the freely open arms for which I ask, or the chase I promise thee as a reward for thy refusal and then!' . . .

“When they were once more upon the moor, Elphi bade Rob stay his torrent of indignation. ‘I must think,’ said the little man. ‘The maid’s case is desperate. As Golpha gets deeper in his cups during the evening the brute within him will become more savage, and the message the serving-man will assuredly deliver may send him in a fury with unrestrained lust to Rosa’s dungeon. Something must be done at once! Lest her heart fail her we must give her courage. Give me the chip from Egfrid’s sandal; she will recognise that in a moment.’ Calling a wren he bade it carry the talisman through the bars of Rosa’s prison and drop it within her lap. When it had flown away on its errand, Elphi said: ‘And

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Now I will ask the aid of one who, though very small, is exceeding wise—the Queen of all the fairies of these five moors.’

“ ‘I am here, good Elphi, to help thy friend and thee,’ said a low musical voice close at hand; ‘indeed, I have already been at work on the maiden’s behoof. I have sent a whole swarm of hornets to build a wall within the rock of Rosa’s prison; a wall which will defy Golpha and all his keys and men for a while. Seek ye out the smith at the castle and bid him in my name with excuses to delay the opening of the door till the morrow. Never fear, you will be there in better frame of mind to see his craft successful when the time comes.’

“ ‘The smith was found, even as he was crossing the courtyard to his forge for tools. ‘The baron hath told me if I have not the door open for him to enter before the glass is empty he will clap me into the next dungeon to the maid he holds as prisoner,’ said the smith; ‘he is in a drunken fury, and I can but hope the Fairy Queen will send sleep to him, else of a certainty I am undone. . . . But, by the rood, I’ll obey her commands, come what may!’

“ On the following morning Elphi and Rob again crossed the moor to the spot where the stake had been driven on the crest of an upgang sheep-trod. Here was it intended to burn Siba the Good, but even then the air was busy with an ever-increasing throng, to the obvious comfort and delight of Elphi. Bustard after bustard flew overhead, each carrying on its back an army of fighting ants; cloud after cloud of angry hornets and wasps kept pace with them in mid-air—and they all flew in one direction,

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the fatal stake! The travellers now had to tarry awhile, for as far as the eye could pierce the undergrowth, and from each airt of the compass, came a sinuous, wriggling procession of adders, hagworms, and askers, with an advance-guard of cruel-eyed relentless stoats. Above them all was heard the raven guides, every now and then croaking a welcome to some new reinforcement to the strange force they led.

“ ‘Fit birds are those,’ said Elphi, ‘for such a scene as this morn will witness. . . . They’ll have their feast and fill ere the sun set! I had a vision yester-night when we slept, and I saw the cruel Golpha’s wife plotting in her jealousy, with Mott, as to how best to end her lord’s misspent life. Truly is it said :

The Devil knew but half his trade
Till ’prenticed to a woman.

I saw Golpha, wotting not of Elba’s perfidy, descend to Rosa’s dungeon and gaze with sensual longing through the grille of the door he could not open. He saw not the Guardian Angel hovering o’er her, but *I* did ; and I knew that all would be well with her and with my own mother, whom he next sought out to taunt.’

“As Elphi related his dream, the big bell at the castle was heard booming and echoing over hill and vale to summon all and sundry to the sport afoot. From the scattered farms and hamlets around the castle they came with sad hearts, for Siba was beloved by all, and it was known that it was she who was to be the baron’s latest victim. In vain did Golpha try to raise a laugh as the old dame was led forth and bound to the stake, and as

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the dry ling and wood was piled about her. 'Haste! haste!' he urged his varlets, 'I long to hear the old hag squeal and squirm. . . . Hast aught to say, thou wizened beldame, ere thou start to cook, a-twisting and a-shrieking?'

"'To thee and thy two companions, naught,' answered Siba; 'to all my good neighbours with pity in their eyes and sorrow in their hearts, I say "*Get ye gone,*" *for those who called you hither by the knolling of that bell have listed to their own doom. It will come shortly, and with terror in its wake for all who bide here. . . . Get ye gone speedily, good friends, ere the ravens croak thrice.*'

"At this many began to move away, and Golpha, furious at the dame's temerity, shouted 'Stop her ranting and light the ling about her'; at which command the ravens commenced a-croaking and the little crowd began to melt more quickly. 'Ricco, the torch!' called Golpha; but Ricco was laid on the ground squirming in agony. 'I am blinded, my lord, I have been stung in both eyes and can see naught.' 'Hackker, then! light the fire and let me see the blue smoke going up.' But Hackker, too, was impotent and now dancing with pain. . . . And the second time the ravens croaked in chorus.

"'Gammer, where art thou? Let me see *thee* set the old witch ablaze; I'll scourge those other varlets till their very bones crack ere the sun goes down.' But Gammer, falling on his knees before his lord and lady, with whom stood Mott, said: 'Good lord, I beg thee flee this place, the very ground is witched and wick with adders, and I dare not touch the torch.' With this he

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rose, glanced again where the torch was laid, and then turned and ran regardless of after consequences.

“ ‘Curses on ye all! I’ll fire the ling myself,’ shouted the baron as he walked over to the torch. . . . And the ravens for the third time croaked overhead. Before Golpha could advance a step towards the stake the air became rife with swarms of hornets and wasps which lighted upon the trio who, with the concealed Elphi and Rob, now remained alone around old Siba. As they settled upon the baron, his wife, and Mott, a huge wave of living, writhing, deadly adders moved towards them, and when they had fallen to the ground shrieking in their agony, they struck their poisonous fangs into their quivering flesh till there was not one inch of their mutilated bodies which was not pierced and blue with venom. In agony their limbs became rigid—and so they died. Then came the ants, slowly as a swelling flood, and before the bell again tolled the hour of sunset at the castle, they and the carrion crows had completed their work—there was not a vestige of flesh left. The moon rose and shone upon those three ghastly whitened skeletons and on that lonely stake and unlighted fire; but by then all those creatures of earth and sky which had come at Elphi’s bidding and to the aid of Siba the Good, had vanished. Siba, too, had gone, for when the last of the reptiles had struck and passed on, Elphi sprang upon the barricade of heather and wood, unbound his mother, and helped her over the heap which was to have burnt her poor tired body. The trio made their way quickly to the castle, sought out the smith, and soon Rosa was in her lover’s arms. He learned how Golpha had

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ensnared her by the aid of Mott, how the former had carried her off pretending that he would save her from Mott and take her to her lover who was in danger of death.

“So the twain were married in due course, Rob selling the rings for what was then a fabulous sum, and becoming one of the principal farmers in the district. One of his first concerns was to see to the rebuilding of Siba’s house, and, as may be imagined, the dwarf and his mother became their closest friends.”

Such, then, is the story of Elphi the Dwarf and Siba the Good, as told by the hostess of the Fox and Hounds at Orra, in Bilsdale. To it my father adds the following note :—

Probably much of the story has been lost by oral transmission down the ages. The banishment of Rosa’s stepmother by community law is only incompletely told. The rings, so curiously obtained, probably played a much more prominent part in the narrative. The hound was originally, no doubt, no mere dog. Links in the story have been forgotten, and one can almost detect where new ones have been inserted of another age and pattern. Some years ago I was fortunate enough to secure an old manuscript written in 1820, by one Calvert, who lived in the neighbourhood of Pickering and Kirbymoorside. He includes the foregoing story amongst the list of traditional legends told in his day and in his parts. He records an interesting doggerel rhyme with a note: “These lines were copied from Miss Blakelock’s Bible. She lived at Lestengham” (now spelled Lastingham) :—

Elphi, bandy legs,
Bent and wide apart.
No one in this dale
Awns a kinder heart.

Elphi the Dwarf and Siba the Good

Elphi, great of head—
Greatest ever seen—
No one in this dale
Awns a brighter een.
Elphi, little chap,
Thoff he were so small,
War big wi' deeds o' kindness ;
Drink to him one and all.
Him that fails to drain dry ;
Be it mug or glass ;
Be not worth a peascod,
Nor a buss frev onny lass.

J. L. 1699.





ix. *The Giant's Lapstone* ❧ ❧

Long years ago, where the road from Kildale to Westerdale crosses Basedale Beck, there stood (on the Westerdale side), a big boulder known locally as "The Giant's Lapstone." To the casual observer, unacquainted with the tradition of the neighbourhood, there was nothing remarkable about it, nothing which seemed to call for any more attention than the scores of other rocks and boulders which are found everywhere in this isolated valley amid the hills, and which add to its greyness and grand severity. But "The Giant's Lapstone" was a familiar landmark to Clevelanders, and one which entered not a little into their lives, legends, hopes, and fears. Hanging, as though balanced and held by some unseen agency, the massive rock was believed to possess the power of detecting those maidens who had in any way deviated from the paths of virtue, or had even wantonly indulged in immodest thoughts or desires. It was the recognised testing-place of virginity and purity to which many voluntarily resorted and others were compulsorily taken when there were doubts as to their continency.

Almost in the centre of the "Lapstone" there was a cavity about two feet deep, for all the world as though, when in plastic state, the deep imprint of a foot had

The Giant's Lapstone

been made. Tradition had it that any maiden, whose purity was tarnished, would have no difficulty in thrusting her left leg well within the hole, whereas, if ever a truly virtuous girl or woman ventured upon the test, the cavity automatically closed towards the apex, thus preventing the foot from being fully inserted. Little wonder, then, that "The Giant's Lapstone" was held as a threat over the heads of some to their terror, whilst others were only too ready to make the pilgrimage to the wild fastnesses of Basedale to prove beyond all further doubt their innocence.

But this was not the only attribute the once famous stone possessed. Newly-married women, generation after generation, made a point of claiming from it certain benefits for any child, or children, with which the gods might bless them. To secure these such a pilgrim was bound by certain conditions. Her visit must be paid on a Monday, and she must take with her a shoemaker's hammer and a shoe for the left foot. The latter must be of the most artistic and expensive make procurable. On arrival she had to seat herself upon the stone and repeat a long doggerel rhyme, but imperfectly remembered half a century ago. Such portions as the late Mr William Scorer (born at Basedale Abbey towards the end of the eighteenth century) recalled, he gave to my father as follows :—

Cobbler, cobbler, look on me,
I come to crave thy blessing,

I beat thy leather for thee.

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Nine nails to bind the heel I take.

A wild boar's bristle, long and strong,
To thy wax-end I fix it.

To nine long strands well rolled,
I wax them well with drawn wax,
I wax, I wax it well for thee.

I wet the welt, I beat the welt,
As on thy last I lay the welt.

Tough and firm from the middle hide,
Well-beaten on thy lapstone,
I lay the sole upon thy last.
Strong as nine wax-ends thrice-doubled,
So none but thy giant hands could pull asunder.

Now lifting up the shoe the suppliant had brought along
with her, she continued :

The shoe is now made,
As well-shaped as it I now put on, I pray
May all my children be ;
Strong in every part.
I claim but one shoe from thee to-day.
May I never have a two-birth.
I cast my old shoe from me,
Poor and shapeless.
No part upon the lapstone ever lay—
Into the water I cast it—
To it may all my ill-luck cling,
And that of all that shall be mine.

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So cobbler look upon me
With favour and great graciousness,
I pray thee look upon me,
And all mine yet unborn ;
Ere I bid to thee good-day.

Some of the missing lines prayed the giant (of whom presently) to secure the good offices and influence of his daughter on the suppliant's behoof.

And now for the legend of "The Giant's Lapstone." In the poetic days of the past there lived in a cave near to the top of Stoney Ridge, a giant, whose very cough sent stones rattling down from Roseberry and Danby Head into the valleys below. Unlike most of his kind, however, his cough was the most frightful part about him. He seems to have been as kind, as good and great of heart, as he was huge of stature. Thus he was beloved by all. He followed the occupation of a cordwainer, but for whom he made boots and how they were delivered no one ever knew. He had one daughter, almost as tall as himself, but, according to local report, she was rarely with her father, and whilst absent on mysterious and ethereal missions left the control of the household economy to an old housekeeper. Tradition further said that had she wished she could have transformed the cave into a palace of beauty and luxury and surrounded her father and herself with a host of servants and all that wealth could give. She possessed the power, but her magic gifts and influence were only employed for others—for the alleviation of suffering and the frustration of the evil designs of the wicked.

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In those days, when the genial giant cobbled away on the top of Stoney Ridge, about five miles from Castleton, there came to live near that place a wicked baron—cruel, licentious, entirely without restraint, and apparently possessing no redeeming quality. He debauched the young men by making drunkards of them, and took them away from their sheep on the hillsides to attend him on hunting expeditions far into Pickering Forest. Everywhere he and his own household went they brought terror with them, for neither maid nor mother was safe. Death, or burnt homes, often followed upon disappointment when women-folk had fled, or the refusal of those who remained to grant his wicked will. The baron was handsome, and those conquests which came to him by cajolery, fair speech, and fairer promises, were much more to his liking than when gained by force or threats. At last murmurs began to reach the good giant of shame spreading like a pestilence over the district. Mothers and maids both came to invoke his aid and protection, which he readily gave, though the form and manner is not remembered except that they were to wear an amulet of leather, curiously wrought and stamped. The giant was growing old and rarely left his cave, so that he knew little of what was happening in the country around. Moreover, he had long since learned to disbelieve one half of local gossip and to treat the other half as exaggerated. When at last fathers and mothers, in sheer desperation, brought their sons and daughters in a body to his workshop to bear testimony to the disgrace and ruin the baron had caused, he was so pained and shocked that his lapstone dropped from his

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knee with a crash which shook the very hills for miles around.

There before him was a band of young men whom he had known from childhood, and watched mature into lusty striplings, now debauched and besotted, the bloom of innocence gone from their cheeks, and marks of sensuality and dissipation in its stead. . . . And the maidens, with their heads hung and crimson with shame, met his pitying eyes as he groaned for very sorrow at the scourge this unclean thing had brought amongst them. Bidding them all be seated, he brought his lapstone from out of the cave, tied a rope around it, and hung it up from the cliff which projected over the entrance to the cave. Then, taking a metal bar, he struck the lapstone thrice, so that it rang out like a mighty bell over hill and dale as though at once warning all who might hear of the wrath to come, and calling upon the gods of honour and purity, of beauty, truth, and youth, to rise in vengeance.

Spellbound did that sad company sit awaiting events which they felt were to follow. Soon a shadow was cast upon the ground, and a chariot, handsomely fashioned after the manner of a gigantic boot, and drawn by thirteen swans, descended into their midst. No sooner had the birds folded their snowy wings than the fair driver, whom they all recognised as the Giant's daughter, demanded to know why she had been thus hurriedly summoned from afar. Her father, pointing to the seated assembly, said :

"Thine eyes, daughter, will best give thee an answer. Look around thee at the young men and maidens whose

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life aforetime was as beautiful and pure as the lily, whose speech and actions were as innocent as those of the dove. . . . The lily has been bruised and crushed and tarnished, and the dove dare no more sing its song. Look ! ”

Turning to the young men, she of great stature said : “ You are men ! Your sin is your own ! You have fallen because you were inclined to evil. The power to remedy your sin and folly lies within yourselves ; it hangs before you like ripened fruit. If you *are* men stretch out your hands and seize it, and when eating, remember what has befallen your sisters and betrothed.” Then she addressed herself to the maidens and said : “ Your case—with some—is different. The lily is a helpless thing when a relentless hand is stretched forth to pluck it. Doubtless many of you have been brought to shame by the wiles, wickedness, and wantonness of others, and when your hearts were full of resentment, loathing, and horror. . . . You shall be tested ! Bring me hither a brazier filled with turf (peat) aglow, and my father's leather knife shaped like the half-moon.”

Placing the brazier beneath the hanging lapstone, and throwing upon its glowing contents a powder, a cloud of thick, sweet-scented, white smoke rose up and quickly enveloped the stone so that it was hid from view. When the smoke had rolled away the Giant's daughter took the crescent-shaped knife and fashioned a hole in the rock, which yielded to her hand as clay to the potter. After this, she threw upon the brazier another powder, which caused the stone to be surrounded by a black cloud, so potent that it restored the rock to its wonted hardness.

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Then she asked her father to carry the stone to a spot she indicated, and, one by one, she called upon the maidens to come forth, and bade each thrust her left leg well within the hole she had cut, drawing up her skirt so that all might see if her foot could enter or no. And so, without then knowing the portent of that which they did, each submitted to the test, and was placed either at the one side or the other of the "Lapstone," according to the verdict given by the foot-shaped aperture. And when the last of the maidens had passed through the ordeal, she, who conducted the mystery, spake first to the greater number on the south of the stone and said :

"Shame shall neither lie on your heads nor on that of your offspring. The child which shall be born to you will crown your head with blessing and not with remorse and sorrow. Peace and happiness shall now follow you all days; the wrong which has been done to you will be avenged, and no man shall cast it in your teeth for all time." To the few, who now knew that they had been set apart as willingly tarnished, she spake thus : "The stone has convicted you, as it will in future convict others who are ready to fall to the first breath of temptation. This day shall the tempter be removed from amongst you, but all your days you shall bear upon you the brand of shame—of the lily which has lost some of its pure beauty. Go, and may the lesson live with you."

She then asked her father to lift the stone into her chariot, and, taking her seat therein, she drove away upward till but a speck in the clouds. And then the chariot seemed as though it were to descend again : it hovered for a moment, the swans rested on their out-

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spread wings, the Giant's daughter was seen to rise, and at that moment the stone fell from the chariot and, with a mighty crash, was embedded in the side of the bank.

As those who had sought the Giant's aid were wending their way homeward they met a maiden filled with fear and agitation. It was a strange story she had to unfold. Whilst on her way to join those who had arranged to visit the mysterious cobbler's cave, she had met with the baron out with his ban dogs. He had called to her to stop, but the louder he called the faster she ran, so that in his anger he set his hounds upon her. Hoping that by crossing running water she would escape from them, she made for Basedale Beck, and succeeded in reaching its edge as the baron, mounted on a horse faster than his hounds, galloped up. He jumped from his horse, and was about to seize her, when her foot slipped and she rolled away from his grasp down the bank. At that moment the heavens seemed to open and a thunderbolt fell covering her with earth and heather, and so terrifying her that she fainted. When she came to herself there was no trace of the baron, and his hounds lay dead around the stone which she had fancied a thunderbolt. It had at once become a Nemesis and a tombstone, and had rid the district of an evil thing.

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My late father adds the following interesting note to this legend :—

About the year 1830 a terrific thunderstorm caused the bank to give way and "The Giant's Lapstone" rolled into the beck. As it diverted the course of the water it was broken up by blasting. Sufficient sentiment and interest was attached to the stone, how-

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ever, for a piece of it to be carted away to Castleton, where for many years it was used as a horse-block (*i.e.* mounting-stone) outside one of the inns. The portion selected was that which had the whole or a part of the imprint of the foot upon it. Eventually it was removed, and, so it is thought, was used by some enterprising roadmakers, who broke it up into a thousand pieces.





x. *T' Hunt o' Yatton Brig*



Two stirring traditional legends my late father reduced to rhyme in the dialect of the North Riding of Yorkshire. As dialect is often forbidding to the general reader, I have "Englished" the manner of presentation of the narratives considerably, perhaps to their detriment as Doric classics, which I hold them to be. The first story, "The Hunt of Yatton Brig," tells a once-popular Cleveland folk-tale, which had its origin about 1760. The witch's curse contained in the rhyme was given to my father a quarter of a century ago by a nonagenarian at Great Ayton, named Mrs Longstaffe, who was born not long after the thrilling events chronicled in the legend took place. It may be mentioned that somewhat similar stories are told of a bridge in Farndale, some twenty miles from Great Ayton, and Borrow Bridge in Westmorland. In the latter version the scapegoat is taken to the summit of Whinfell Beacon. Eventually he is drowned in Esthwaite Water after having been hunted by the ghost of every female buried in the local churchyard who had yielded to the blandishments and false promises of unworthy wooers. The astrals of these unfortunate girls appeared to the Westmorland victim as he was gathering requisite mould and moss from graves in the kirkyard.

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Neither of these companion legends contain the same amount of lore as that which is included in the dramatic and well-told story which follows. It has been thought well to include some explanatory notes on this lore, and these may add both to the interest and value of the whole. Comment and criticism may be superfluous on my part, but as editor I should like to say that I consider "T' Hunt o' Yatton Brig" and "Auld Nan of Sexhow" two of the best bits of work my late father did, two of the most telling folk-legends preserved to us, and, incidentally, two real dialect classics. They are of added value as illustrative of the power of imagination of, and the influence of superstitious fear upon, those who lived only a century and a half ago in isolated parts of the country.

'Twar Saturday night an' pitch dark it war,
Wiv a rumm'l o' thunner i' t' air ;
An' t' rain, why it cam straight doon iv a blash,
An' now an' again bright leetnin' wad flash,
While t' sky war all iv a glare ;
An' then t' feersome night wad seem steep'd i' black,
Fer t' eye-sight were blinnded wi' t' flash,
While folk war all deafened with rackit an' din,
An' they felt that this world is a world gi'en ti sin,
As they tremm'ld at every crash.
On that Saturday night a bit turned o' ten,
There war yan 'at fra Newtonwards cam,
Sweat stood on his brow, a scowl on his face,
Bud t' leetnin' nor thunner could slacken his pace,
As he hurried from t' auld folk at yam,
He was bound for ti do what shouldn't be done

T' Hunt o' Yatton Brig

By them 'at aim ti do right ;
He aim'd having his way, no matter hoo mich,
It must cost in t' end, he wad gan an' see t' witch,
Aye, ti Yatton that Saturday night.
T' evil one had gitten a grip of his sowl,
As he took hisselt straight ower t' Green,
To the tumm'l down spot, where auld Nanny dwelt,
He was fairly on t' doorstan afore that he felt
It mebbe had better have been
In t' end to have letten things take their own gate.
Through a bit of a crack, he saw t' auld lass set,
Croanin' away over t' hob ;
Three times she spat, as she dropped in a pan
Things she took from her lap, took 'em all yan by yan,
An' sang as she wagg'd her auld gob :—

Fire come, fire gan,
Curlin' smoke keep out of t' pan ;
There's a toad i' t' fire, a frog on t' hob,
Here's t' heart from a crimson ask,
Here' a tooth from the head
Of one who's dead,
And never got through his task.
Here's, prick'd in blood, a maiden's prayer,
The eye of man maun't see,
It's prick'd upon a yet warm mask,
An' lapt about a bright green ask,
An' it's all for him an' thee.
It boils, thoo'll drink,
He'll speak, thoo'll think,
It boils, thoo'll see,
He'll speak, thoo'll dee.

T' Hunt o' Yatton Brig

'Twas a spell she was warkin' 'at booded no good
To them 'at she aim'd for to dee.
John tremm'ld an' quaked, as he seed all she did,
He thowt ti be off, but she just clapt on t' lid ;
An' croak'd oot " I'm riddy for thee,
Pull t' bobbin, (A) pull, I've been lookin' for thee,
Deean't ta be fearsome, thoo's no call to be,
I knaw what thoo's efther an' ken who thoo is,
I've watch'd what she's done, I know what he diz,
Thoo's come in a hig,¹ I knaw mun ! I knaw ! "
Skrik'd oot auld Nan, as she wagg'd her auld jaw.
She was despert cross-eyed, while her snout an' her chin
Said hoo d'ye ya do, ti her two teeth wivin ;
Her nails they war lang, an' hump'd was her back,
An' both lugs war pointed, her skin ommaist black,
She'd long boney arms, wiv a head like a mop ;
Though both legs war bent, she was wick as a lop :
If she came like a snail, like a weasel she'd gan,
An' she opp'nly traded wi' t' divil did Nan.
She made nowt ti do, when t' young chap came in,
But sat wiv her han's out to t' glow ;
T' creckits they chirped, while she croak'd an auld sang,
An' summat she sipp'd at smelt very strong,
As if it had come from below.
Laid iv her lap was a great yellor toad,
A dead flittermouse dangl'd from t' roof,
On t' hearthstone there stood a gloorin' black cat,
At t' back of her chair a raven was sat,
" There noo," she said, " That's enough."
An' t' creckits dropp'd their chirpin',

¹ Temper.

T' Hunt o' Yatton Brig

While t' toad jumped from her lap,
An' t' raven held it's croakin',
An' t' cat ligg'd down to nap.
" Whya now then, Johnny Simpson,
Ah'll listen to thi tale,
So sit tha down on t' crecket,¹
An' think on do not fail
To let's have t' truth. My raven
Will croak for every lee,²
T' cat 'll spit, t' toad 'll swell,
T' creckits 'll chirp out as well,
For every lee that you do tell,
Don't try t' gam on wi' me."
So Johnny sat on t' crecket,
An' told how t' lass he'd thought to wed,
He'd ta'en up wiv another,
An' a lot more Johnny said,
While Nanny shouted " Hold your whisht !
An' hearken unto me,
Thoo's set on fer ti harm 'em,
But they maun't know that it's thee.
Now, wad you like 'em blinndin' ?
Or him a hare-lip gi'en ?
Or every thing they do, mun
Through a jealous eye be seen ?
Or would you hev 'em differ ?
I've given choice I'm sure,
Or would you like 'em wedded
An' parted at t' chetch door ? "
Said John, " I'll have 'em wedded,

¹ Small stool, not to be confused with "crickets on the hearth."

² Lie.

T' Hunt o' Yatton Brig

Wi' t' race ¹ as they gan yam (B)
Bud plate must fall unbroken (C)
An' then let both feel sham,
For as they gan ti t' altar steps
Let each a false step mak ; (D)
Then both 'll ken a hidden fault
T' ane t' ither's holdin' back.
An' make t' clock strike as there they stan', (E)
An' let t' ring fall to ground, (F)
An' let it roll fra t' altar steps
An' by a lass be found ;—
Or let it roll while it diz lig
O' sum flat grave-stone there.
Then it'll be a fittin' hoop
For such a bride to wear ;
An' may a cat gan thwart their path, (G)
As down t' chetch trod they gan,
An' mak a rake ² her footprint fit, (H)
An' brassendly, there stan'.
An' as they are to take a swig (I)
From the first hot-pot they meet ;
Make it upset and blash on t' ground ;
An' 't wad be such a sight
If you, afore she lifts her gown, (J)
To 'liver up her band,
Took t' roundness from her shaply leg,
While she's t' worst leg i' t' land ;
About her shin her bridal band (K)
Must draggle all i' t' muck,

¹ The race customarily held after weddings.

² A dissolute fellow.

T' Hunt o' Yatton Brig

Let t' winner shame to take his prize,
An' so must bring ill-luck.
An' 't wad be such a capper,
If all at once 't was seen
T' dress she'd been a-wedded in
Was daub'd wi' blue an' green ; (L)
Let 'em meet an empty coffin, (M)
Let a hen on t' doorstan crow,
T' seein' glass must crack itsen,
An' then mebbe she'll know
T' cup o' joy has always dregs—
Dregs 'at she'll have to sip,
An' when he's going ti kiss her
Thoo mun then draw up his lip ;
Bloss her feeace wi' blebs an' blanes,
Let t' day end up wi' strife ;
If you'll only do this for me, Nan,
I's thine, I'll swear, for life."
Nan croodled an' werrick'd when Johnny had done,
An' t' toad loup'd back in her lap,
Nine times on t' hearthstan' she bang'd with a stick,
An' t' raven croaked thrice, an' t' creckits said "crick,"
An' t' cat waken'd up from its nap.
" I've listened to you, now listen to me :
All thoo wants can be done, but I ken
You're nowt but a raggel, of that mun I's seear,
An' I don't reckon much to owt 'at you'll swear,
What's to do, shall be done by thisen.
Now listen to me while I tell,—
All t' things 'at thoo wants to mell ¹ on yon two

¹ Injure.

T' Hunt o' Yatton Brig

I've gitten, but you, through t' darkness o' t' night,
Wi' thunder for music, an' t' leetnin' for light,
Must gan out an' laat ¹ 'em thisel.

Now gan thi ways to t' Holly-garth
An' cross thi hands.

From Yatton Brig, then turn thi face,
Don't stir thi feet, but mark weel t' place,
Whereon thoo stands ;

My bizzum swing thrice round thi heead,
For t' ullot ² wait ;

An' when she's hooted thrice times three,
Start backwards goin', but mindful be
There's nowt i' t' gate ; ³

For if thoo tumm'ls there thoo'll lig
While its daylight ;

*Bud whahl thoo bez foothold of t' Brig
Nowt 'at 's wick, dead, larl or big,
Can laam tha John tinight.*

For t' churchyard make, thi hardest gan,
Tak ower t' wall, (N)

Fra t' grave of one who kill'd hissels
Gather mould to work thy spell,
Work 't in a ball.

From any headstan' scrape some moss,
(But not from two !)

Pluck of grass a single blade,
An' as thoo chews it, wish for t' maid
All t' ill you'd do.

Then hurry back to t' Holly-garth,
Stand where you stood.

¹ Seek.

² Owl.

³ Way.

T' Hunt o' Yatton Brig

In t' ground work both t' moss an' t' ball,
An' wish all t' ill you wad befall
Tom Smith an' Mary Mudd.
An' when you've done gan to t' auld well,
By t' Dotteril side ;
An' wash thi han's, think on while there
Upon thi marrow bones to swear,
You will abide
By all I say through t' comin' year ;
Then cross thi han's,
An' keep 'em so while Yatton Toon
Ahint thi back is lying doon,
Now off thoo gans.
Bud Johnny Simpson bear i' mind
To wash thisel ;
Owt 'at I've said to slip don't aim,
For if you do you'll be to blame,
An' if to-night you wad gan heeam,
My bizzum lig by t' well."
Wi' that, she bang'd t' door in his face,
John thowt " Bah gum !
It mebbe would have better been
If I t' auld witch had nivver seen,
But, ez I've come,
I'll go through wi' 't. 'To-night," said he,
" I's goin' ti spend
Wi' divils, and I know not what ;
But I'll watch t' larl things at every bat,
An' I'll deea ¹ t' auld witch i' t' end."

¹ Outwit.

T' Hunt o' Yatton Brig

He backwards walk'd, he climb'd the wall,
He t' bizzum swung, he did it all.
T' grass he chew'd, t' mould he gat,
T' moss he scraped, he nowt forgat.

Then rested a piece on Yatton Brig-end,
For he felt like a real auld man ;
“ It's over'd,” he said. “ It's done now for good,
I've worked 'em all t' ill 'at ever I could,
An' I've done now for ever wi' Nan.
I *won't* wash meself, I'll promise her *nowt*.”
An' i' t' beck her bizzum he flang.
An' Yatton he left with a smile on his face,
Breakin' his word was to him no disgrace,
But he thowt, as he hurried along,
Fra t' air above strange whisperin's cam',
At t' first he nowt could see,
But flutterin' wings flapped round his head,
An' faces came—faces fra t' dead,
As plain, as plain could be.
He could see their e'en-holes gloorin',
While their skinless jaws did gen
With arms outstretch'd to catch him,
While i' t'end, ti save his-sen,
He off as hard as he could gan,
Now ommaist flay'd to death
But afore Langbarugh was far behint
He was sairly held for breath.
Like one 'at 's drunk he stakkard,
Till he got ti t' top o' t' hill,
An' there he found three night-hags sat,

T' Hunt o' Yatton Brig

Who tell'd him to stan' still.

"We've catch'd tha, but we never should,"

Together they all said,

"If t' oath thoo'd ta'en, an' wash'd thisel,

An' t' bizzum left beside the well ;

An' cross'd thi han's, while Yatton Toon

Ahint thi back was liggin' doon,

This night thoo'd spent i' bed.

But we've gitten tha, we ha'e tha !

Thoo can't 'scape frev us noo ! "

(They stevvon'd out, as round they pranced,

An' skrieked, an' genned, an' loup'd, an' danced),

"To-night's work man thoo'll rue."

An' then t' three on 'em round him gat

An' all beeald oot "Leeak ! See !

There's damp grave-mould on owther han',

Thoo hezn't done as tell'd by Nan,

'T'll be man t' warse for thee.

Don't tell no lees, we ken tha weel,

To-night thoo's ours, John ;

There's dead man's moss unn'er thi nails,

Wa won't believe none o' thi tales,

So thoo munnot try it on."

Hold of his han's an' feet they click'd,

An' tell'd him he warn't ti tew

Hissen, acoz 't would do no good,

Then off wi' Johnny they flew.

Ti t' top o' Roseberry they went,

An' atween his legs they tied

Nan's bizzum, they'd fetch'd from out of t' beck

An' screeched "Thi hardest rahd ! ¹

¹ Ride.

T' Hunt o' Yatton Brig

An' for thi meanness of this night,
Thoo'll finnd ahint thi track
The wraith of many a deein' maid (o)
An' parlous deed they'll mak,
For sharp thoo'll larn 'at lovely forms
Can scrat, an' lug, an' tear.
Now hearken mun ! to what we tell :
This night thoo's gahin' to pay
Fer t' curse thoo aim'd for Mary Mudd,
Now get thisen away.
Ten minutes start we give you, John,
To get clean out o' sight ;
By t' moss an' t' mould we'll scent you lad,
An' hunt you John to-night.
We've ullots trained,
A cletch of bats,
Flay-boggles without feet ;
We've gobblin' dogs, (p)
An' great big frogs,
An' they'll all hunt thee to-night.
You'll stan' in need
Of Nan's best steed ;
You'll have to gan a pace,
Or else you'll see
Her curse 'll be
Thine, if thoo losses t' race.
Of one thing, John,
You must think on
Not to gan yam to-night,
If t' threshold you cross,
By t' mould an' t' moss,

T' Hunt o' Yatton Brig

You'll dee afore daylight ;
An' don't forget
Thisen to hit,
Whenevver you do feel
That you must stop,
Or's like to drop,
Then lace thisen right weel ;
This hezzel ¹ tak,
You'll finnd it mak
No light work for thi han's ;
Now it's a stick
To mak you wick,
That's all,—now off thoo gans ! ”
Each gave him a bang, an' off Johnny flew
As quick as a night-raven gans ;
Flayed out of his wits, with all 'at he heeard,
Daff'ld an' dawl'd, t' great rackapelt feared
Tha'd get him again i' the'r han's.
He thowt 'at ten minutes was not very lang
To make hissen scarce, if he must,
Astride of a bizzum, he mutter'd “ Aye dear !
Like t' Devil I's gahin' an' I don't know where.
I only wish 'at I could
On t' earth stan' again ; I soon would be free,
An' t' night-hags might jump over t' moon.”
Then slap down he came, with a bang among t' stones,
He thowt 'at he'd brokken, aye, t' most of his bones ;
But he fan 'at it warn't ti be done.
He couldn't loose a sing'l knot,—
Aa ! how he tewed hissel :

¹ Hazel stick.

T' Hunt o' Yatton Brig

He fought, an' tore, an' rav'd, an' swore,
But each knot with a spell
Was tied, he couldn't loose 'em.
So he smouted¹ onny-where,
But t' frogs croak'd out an' seem'd to shout—
“Come, Johnny Simpson's here.”
So up he loup'd, but couldn't stir
While t' hezzel stick he used,
Then, ommaist crazed, great wheeals he raised,
While he was sairly bruised.
Then off he went, for now he heard
A parlous din in t' air,
Such skrikes, an' beeals, an' youls, and squeals,
Of yeffin' dogs an' croaking frogs,
An' I can't say what mair.
They soon war flackkerin' over t' spot,
A hung-ry, ang-ry crew,
T' auld hags screamin',
Boggles gleamin',
Ullots hootin',
Youls an' shootin',
Wings all flappin',
Barkin', snappin',
Thrussin', tearin',
Cursin', swearin',
It was a hubbleshoo !
But John was off for Easby Bank,
'Twas Kildale Force he meant,
Once there, he thought,
He mebbe might

¹ Hid.

T' Hunt o' Yatton Brig

Get washed, an' so spoil t' scent. (Q)
But there came a crack of thunder,
An' such a blaze of light,
That far an' near
Was made so clear
That Johnny ken'd
That that warn't t' end
Of his wild race that night.
There cam a youl behind him,
They'd seen him, that was plain ;
Then Johnny thought
“ I can't do aught,
But I's fun' out, there is no doubt,
I've laak'd a lossin' game.”
Once again he rode, straight for t' beck,
Runnin' water he aim'd for to cross,
Once over he sigh'd, I's be a free man,
None on 'em dare follow, nay, not even yan. (R)
But he fan he was ridin' a hoss
That ken'd his game, and had made up its mind,
T' beck not to loup, an' so set him free,—
'Twas gan straight ahead, wi' no time to waste,
'Twas wallop an' slash, curse, blether an' haste,
For t' wraiths close ahint he could see.
Then these words came into his head
When t' wraith's were fair i' sight—
But whabl thoo bez foothold of t' Brig
Nowt 'at's dead, wick, larl, or big,
Can laam tha John to-night.
So at t' top of his voice he fair stevvon'd out :
“ Come on wi' ya every yan :

T' Hunt o' Yatton Brig

Wraiths all so smilin', naked, beguillin',
Ullots an' dogs, boggles an' frogs,
All 'at you've gotten wi' t' devil you're smitten,
Come on ! an' do t' warst 'at you can."
He leathered hissen while blood spurted out,
Each stroke might have been from a knife,
But t' warser t' pain was an' t' harder he went,
He hammer'd an' bray'd while t' stick it was bent,
Fer now he was gahin' for his life.
A waff now an' then he gat frev a wing,
An' t' hags rode so near to his rigg
That he felt, more 'an once, t' auld things give a click
At his clothes, but he took an' he bray'd 'em wi' t' stick
While he went like an arrow for t' Brig.
T' bleach mills, an' Easby were now at his back,
To t' right Little Yatton it lay,
He spared not hissen, for he ken'd very soon
T' hunt wad be over'd an' t' hags wad be done.
But i' t' dark poor John missed his way.
By t' waterfall he aim'd to gan,
Over t' green i' t' dark he took,
All t' lot he heard close at his tail,
He felt 'at now he munnot fail,
Ahint he scarce dare look.
Then Yatton town was wakken'd,
With a rackkit an' a din,
Such as never was afore
An' never has been sin' ;
Out of bed faulk loup'd an' darked
To see what they might see,
Flay'd to death 'at t' end had come,

T' Hunt o' Yatton Brig

If not, what could it be ?
For t' air was fill'd wi' skrikes an' yells,
An' t' sound of monny wings,
An' Yatton Green seem'd fairly wick
With maist unearthly things ;
Some thought this, an' some thought that,
An' some thought 'at they'd seen
T' auld Un,¹ dancin' with his imps,
That night on Yatton Green.
But what they thought John didn't know,—
He nobbut bray'd hissels,
T' lead he was fairly takkin'
While he came just over t' well,
When t' bizzum dropped, an' so did he,
Head first right into t' beck.
They round him war, when up he gat,
With arms lapt round his neck ;
'Mang auld pan lids an' brokken pots
John stakkard as he fought,
But t' stick he'd lost, an' John found out
His han's war worse 'an nowt ;
An' as he scramml'd up t' bank side,
They cluther'd round him so,
Do what he could, it was no good,
John couldn't get away.
They had him ! aye they had him !
They down'd him on his rigg,²
Just when he thought ti 'scape 'em,
At t' foot of Yatton Brig,
One ullot bit his lips i' two,

¹ The devil.

² Back.

T' Hunt o' Yatton Brig

While t' hags they bent his bones,
An' t' bats they suck'd his bleedin' face
Till it was blebs an' bleeans ;
But when at last a cock *did* crow
They shouted, " We mun gan ! "
They whirl'd three times about his head
An' left poor Johnny ommaist dead,
Then off flew every yan.
An' when John dragg'd hissen to t' Brig,
He found auld Nanny there,
She said : "*Thoo didn't wash thisel'
Nor lig my bizzum down by t' well,
But I s'all finnd it there.*
*Thoo thought 'at when thoo cursed yon two
Ther' was nowt else for thoo ti do ;
Feel at thi face.*
*My curse hex lighted on thisel',
Thoo's hunted been wi' things fra Hell,
To thy disgrace.*
*Auld Nan thoo thowt to over-reach,
I's much too auld for thoo to teach,—
Thoo'll wiser be*
*For this night's hunt. Noo John I've seen
Folk 'at would call tha for bein' so mean,
But I bear no grudge for aught thoo's deean,
Listen ti me :*
*I'll tell tha hoo to 'scape from t' spell,
To morn at night tho'll wash i' t' well,
An' every night,
While Barbara an' her bairns thoo spy
Settlin' down in t' western sky,*

T' Hunt o' Yatton Brig

Then speed thi feet ;

For such a storm that night shall blow

As t' auldest chap did never know,

Then cross thi han's,

An' keep 'em so, while Yatton Town

Ahint thi back is liggin' down ;

Now off thoo gans."

Night after night John wash'd hissels',

Five weeks or so he wrowt wi' t' spell,

Then he got free !

An' that night raged sikan a storm

As none could mind since they war born,

An' t' auld yew tree

In t' churchyard fell wi' bows all bent,

An' t' thack from many a roof was rent,

An' t' chiml'y stacks war blawn about

An' many a house to'nd inside out,

'T war such a night !

But John took off afore t' storm cam,

He'd wash'd hissens an' hurried yam

Wi' both hands cross'd, while Yatton Town

Ahint his back war liggin' down.

He'd brokken t' spell !

And through that storm John laid his head

An' slept like one 'at sleeps wi' t' dead,

From first to last he never heard

A soond of t' storm !

Explanatory Notes on Folklore

- (A) Formerly there was fastened to every cottage sneck a piece of cord, this passed through a small hole to the outside, and to it was attached a bobbin, on pulling this the sneck lifted.

T' Hunt o' Yatton Brig

- (B) The race for the bride's garter was a common custom well on into this century, the competitors usually starting from the church porch, the moment the ring was placed upon the bride's finger. The bride's door was the winning post. The successful competitor claimed the privilege of removing the garter or bridal-band from the bride's leg.
- (C) On arriving at the door of the bride's home, the bride was presented with a plate upon which was a small cake, a little of which she ate, throwing the remainder over her shoulder, thereby signifying the hope that they might always have enough and something to spare. The bridegroom then took the plate and threw it over his left shoulder, their hope of future happiness depending upon its being broken on falling to the ground.
- (D) Either to stumble or make a false step as they approached the altar rail was a sure sign than an unconfessed moral slip had been committed.
- (E) It was, and in many places still is, considered most unlucky for the bridal party to be in the church when the clock strikes the hour appointed for the ceremony, hence, they often remain outside the porch until the hour has chimed.
- (F) It is still considered unlucky for the ring to fall to the ground during the ceremony, and especially so should it roll *away* from the altar steps. In such a case, no kindly disposed bridesmaid would think of helping to find it, as, should a maid do so, she would be certain to work evil, and cause jealousy, and most probably strive to win the bridegroom's affections. Should it roll until it rested upon a recumbent grave-stone, it signifies an early death to one of them according to the sex resting beneath.
- (G) For any four-footed animal (and worst of all a cat) to cross their path, as they passed from the church door to the gate, was a dreadful calamity, plainly setting forth the idea that ill-will and spite would be their lot.

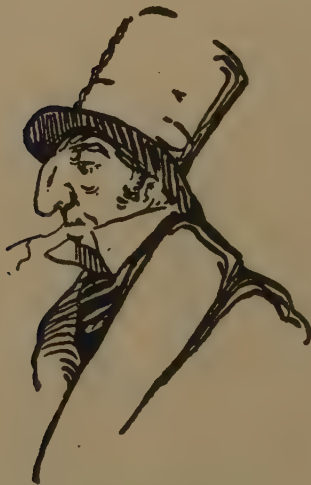
T' Hunt o' Yatton Brig

- (H) For a man, even by accident, to cover with his foot the footprint of the bride, if made between the church door and gate, was most unlucky, as it clearly denoted she would be run after by other men, but for a dissolute fellow to openly commit such an act, simply held a bride up to public shame. A bridesmaid, however, often attempted on the sly to accomplish the feat, as it put her in the way of following in the bride's steps.
- (I) As the bridal party left the church gate, and throughout their walk to the bride's home, they were often met by friends carrying hot-pots. These were basins or bowls filled with steaming punch. To spill any of the contents of the first bowl from which they drank was looked upon as a most unlucky omen, as in that case they let slip from them the first kindly wishes for their health and happiness.
- (J) After the plate had been broken, the bride attempted to cross the threshold but found the winner of the race kneeling within the doorway, waiting to claim his much-coveted prize, placing her left foot just over the threshold, the bride lifted her gown, permitting him to remove her bridal-band. This, by the way, was valued as a potent love-charm.
- (K) For the bridal garter to slip down and become soiled was a dreadful mishap, and for a winner to kneel and afterwards refuse to claim and remove his prize, was an outrageous insult and always the outcome of ill-will and spite, and considered an omen of ill-luck.
- (L) Blue and green were, and are still, considered most unlucky colours for a bridal costume.
- (M) To meet an empty coffin was understood to clearly signify one of them would soon die. The other unlucky omens contained in the subsequent lines fully explain themselves.
- (N) When herbs, etc., were to be gathered from the churchyard to work evil with, the gatherer might not enter by the gate—

T' Hunt o' Yatton Brig

he must climb the wall ; the idea seems to have been that he must enter and leave like a thief.

- (o) It was a common belief that the wraith of a dying maid could work ill on any man who tried in any way to injure a true maid about to be married, *i.e.* during the time the banns were being published.
- (p) Possibly these were the Gabriel ratchets.
- (q) To remove from his hands the soil and other matter with which he had become contaminated, whilst in the churchyard, which afforded the scent, and enabled the howling crew to follow him.
- (r) Witches had no power to follow their victim if he or she crossed running water, always providing they did so over a bridge at some point below the first bridge spanning its banks, otherwise the crossing of water was of no avail.





xi. *Auld Nan of Sexhow* ❧ ❧

Auld Nan of Sexhow in Cleveland—her surname has long been forgotten—is reported to have lived about a mile to the south-west of the hamlet of that name. She was not only a reputed witch, but also believed to be a miserly skinflint, despite her accredited wealth. She had an orphan niece, also Nanny, whom she had adopted, and treated with much harshness during her life, though, in an indirect way, she endeavoured to make amends after her death. Young Nanny had been wronged by a dissolute local farmer called Tom Flinders, around whom the major part of the stirring story centres. My late father, who wrote the old legend in blank verse, adds a note to the effect that he has adhered closely to the tradition as he heard it told by old folk half a century ago. As in the case of “T’ Hunt o’ Yatton Brig,” the natural force and vigour of the narrative has been somewhat destroyed by the substitution of “plain English” for the much more expressive dialect in which the story was primarily written. It was published in its original form in Part xxiv, Vol. iv of the *Transactions of the Yorkshire Dialect Society*.

Auld Nan of Sexhow

Tom Flinders had thoughts it was time for sheet lane,¹
For his glass was drained dry, and his pipe it was done,
So he stood up and stretched, and gave a great sigh,
But raked t' logs together, and sat down again.
Then he refilled his glass, and once more charged his pipe,
And strave for to conjure some brass for to pay
The debts that were plaguing his head worse than nits;
But scheme as he would he could *not* find a way.
And he wasn't a hang-gallus, no rackapelt he;
He was steady, hard-working, with oft a wet sark²
With toiling and moiling, with a "never give ower,"
He wrought like a horse from cock-crow till dark.
Some said luck had left him, while a bonny few aimed
That t' auld witch at Broughton had cast an ill spell;
They were all of one mind, he was sorely put to 't³
What was best to be done, nobody could tell,
And neither could *he*. And he sat by his fire
As twelve bats from t' long case⁴ tell'd midnight was nigh.
So he laid down his pipe and swigged off his glass,
Then chair-bound he sat, with fear fixing his eyes.
He rubbed both his e'en, he slapped both his thighs,
He pinched both his arms, gave his snout a great twist,
And muttered: "I'm bet to know if I sleep,
Or wakened, or what"; then he bealed out: "What is't?"
For summat uncanny was shaping itself,
From nowt, out of nowt, nigh t' ingle-nook chair.
It was small, it was black, but it soon showed itself
In t' shape of a woman. Then Tom skrieked with fear:
"Oh! pray Lord forgive me, all t' ill that I've done,

¹ Bed.

² Shirt.

³ Emergency, embarrassed.

⁴ Grandfather clock.

Auld Nan of Sexhow

here's lots that I know a vast worse than me,
a t' dark you've mista'en me for some randiboo.¹
old on, I'll stirr t' logs, and then, Lord, You'll see
or Thyself, I's Tom Flinders, You've sairly put on,
ou've harassed me all roads, while out of my head
ith troubles and losses, I'm daffled and dazed,
nd now, Lord, You flay me with one come from
t' dead.

own I was false to poor Nanny Ware—
ut I'll wed her, I swear it, I'll mak her me wife ;
ll mak her amends, I will, Lord, I will !
nd I'll ho'd to her truly for t' rest of my life."

ou must know that his thumbs and his toes both
turned in,

ne eye was a-cock, and we know that those three
ay on a chap's back, from t' day of his birth.
ch cannot do right—such a thing could not be.
nd it's t' same with a lass, who's foot overlaps,
ho's brows over t' e'en make a line all in yan,
ho's lips, when they're shutten, turn outward full red—
uch a one's a pert jade, and won't go past a man.
ow though Nan Ware had done what was skittish and
wrang,

was loving too well that led her astray,
or she held to be true all that ever Tom said,
ut, poor lass, she got her eyes opened one day ;
or in t' end folk they clacked : " It was time she was
wed."

oor Nan coloured sorely, when all saw her shame,

¹ A royster, a wastrel, a libertine.

Auld Nan of Sexhow

And her heart almost broke, when she learnt from Tom's
lips

That he never meant aught but the Devil's own game.

So Tom rubbed, and slapped, and cried out : " O Lord !
I find there's a vast, when I call things to mind,
Aye much that I've done that won't bide day-light,
One finds out in t' end the Lord's never blind."

" Hold your whist, Tommy Flinders," croaked a weak
voice from t' nook,

" Turn your head, man, this road, for I've not long to
stay,

I've come'd for your good, so hearken to me,
Your troubles are ended, only do as I say."

With great drops of sweat standing cold on his brow,
Tom Flinders sat still, gripping t' arms of his chair,
He kenn'd 'twas Auld Nannie from t' dead come again
To maybe warn him, that his own end was near.

Like a shadow Nan sat—she might have been smoke,
Or fashioned from t' stoor¹ that oft plays with wind,
Or woven from t' harr,² that hangs over t' fog,³

When t' leea's done its work. Said Nan : " Tom you'll
find

At t' low end of my garth, by t' holly bush tree,
A kail-pot there lays with siller enoo

To set you on your legs, with a fresh start in life—

I gi'e tha 't, Tom Flinders, I gi'e 't all to thoo.

But hearken to one who's freed now from t' grave,

'Mang t' silver you'll find gold pieces enoo,

¹ Smoke.

² Fog, mist.

³ Meadow aftermath.

Auld Nan of Sexhow

to mak t' farm thy own, and stock it as well,
out of t' gold, Tommy Flinders, none of it's for thoo.
mak t' silver, my lad ; every piece call thy own ;
to spend it, to save it, to work good or ill—
out t' gold you must 'liver each piece up to Nan,
not holding one back to work thy own will.
at Stokesley town-end, half-hungred to death,
here lives Nanny Ware (my own sister's lass)
' brass cursed me when wick, may it do *her* some good ;
out mark, Tommy Flinders, I won't let it pass,
now a curse from dead lips shall be on thy head,
and by t' nails in my own coffin lid, Tom, I swear,
some twelve-month this night, once again from the dead
you'll find me—I swear it—once again sitting here.
you wed her, all well, but I don't hold you to it,
but if down in thy heart, you mean to do right,
as far as you can, you'll mak her amends
don't forget you once strave for to fling her on t' street).
now, if you're a man, you'll do as one should ;
think on what she's lost, don't forget what you stole.
to her you're beholden ; now what do you say ?—
you wed her, t' gold's thine—all thoo finds in my kail !”

.
sooner had Nan had her say, than she went
like the pop from a gun ; Tom couldn't say where,
but he knew that she'd ta'en herself off like a crack
and he found himself all of a dither with fear.
Tom aimed 'twas a dream, but he said to himself :
It's not far to t' garth, and a spit's ¹ no great weight,
l away—and turn t' sods all round t' holly bush.”

¹ A spade.

Auld Nan of Sexhow

So he put a spill¹ to t' lantern and followed its light.
At the first graft² he took Nan's kail-pot he struck.
He was soon on his knees, but not for to pray,
But to prize open t' lid, and stare with dazed eyes—
He could hardly hold back from shouting "Hooray."
It was almost chokeful of silver and gold;
How he got it hugged home, he never could tell,
But like one who's deep drunken, he staggered along,
The Devil whisperin' all t' way: "Keep t' lot for your-
self!"

It's yours, mun, you fund it, t'war the Lord sent a dream.
You can settle with folks and mak t' farm your own;
You can stock it, and till it, as you've long wanted to,
They'll all call you 'mister,' and hat-doff and fawn.
You can do as you like, with none to say 'nay,'
There's nowt you need want by day or by night,
You can hold up your head with the best of 'em now—
Do you ken you're well off, lad, with the world at your
feet?"

Tom counted out t' silver, laid the gold in small heaps,
And he hearkened to t' Auld 'Un, an' so sucked in sin.
Then he thought to himself: "All my troubles are
o'er"—

Had the fool but known they had yet to begin!
From that night 'twas noticed how flush Tommy was;
On t' fondest of games he fair flang brass away,
But for anything menseful³ not a farthing would he
Let slip through his fingers. Yet summat would say:
"You're not doing right, Tom, by the living or dead,

¹ Lighter.

² A spadeful.

³ Decent, orderly, creditable.

Auld Nan of Sexhow

Be certain of one thing : Auld Nannie her due
Will claim from you some day, and relentless she'll be,
And all t' ill you've wrowten, she'll cause you to rue."

Folks soon shook their heads ; sich deeds couldn't last ;
The Lord, Tom would hear some day shouting "ho'd !"
There's nowhere to hide then—no loose-hafted tale
Dare any set off with to face t' throne of God.

But (as Molly Moore said), " When t' Devil shakes hands,
He tickles one's palm as he slaps one on t' back,
He greases well in, and before he lets go,
Says, " Well done, my buck ! you your mark's sure to
mak."

So Tom raffled on, giving way more and more,
For he never left Stokesley till rowling in drink
He royed on, and gambled with young Nannie's gold
Till his carryings on made all decent folk shrink.
Some aimed that he'd dug up a great pot o' brass,
A few thought he'd betted at t' races and wan,
While othersome whispered : " It's to t' Devil he's sold
The right of his soul—nowt can save such a man ! "
And all through his roysing, randiboo games
Poor Nannie tewed on, half-hungered to death,
She knew nowt of t' gold that was squandered away,
Just earning enough for water and bread.
But one night at dark'ning, while a-knitting Nan sat,
Her aunt came again (who'd been dead nigh a year),
" You needn't be flayed, lass," she whispered to Nan,
" Though I showed you while living small kindness, I fear.
But I've comed now to tell you while laid in my grave,
I've learned for to rue all I laid on you, lass.

Auld Nan of Sexhow

And to make some amends, to Tom Flinders I went,
And I tell'd him of t' place where I'd felted ¹ my brass
I gave him all t' silver, I gave *thee* all t' gold,
But he's held back thy due, and while you hunger, here
He's sodden with drink, but his reckoning's nigh !
When I tell'd him where t' brass was I gave him a year
To settle his own debts, to do right by thee—
To wed you, niece Nanny, your due, lass, by rights.
My warning he's flouted, your road never looked,
But companied with any loose drab off the streets ;
He's drunk more than a fish, lived worse than a hog ;
There's no suds in heaven could wash his soul clean !
All maks and manders of ill-deed he's wrowt,
For of late he's done nowt that he ought to have done ;
But his time's almost up, his footsteps are few.
Only once again, lass, t' sun will shine overhead,
And when it goes down that's the last on 't for him,
For before it comes up, lass, I swear he'll be dead."

.
For the first time young Nannie found tongue for to
speak,
For old love she kenned wasn't dead in her heart ;
" Oh, wae's 't, ² who he's so much wronged !
I beg of you give poor Tom a fresh start."
" No ! no ! lass, bear up, don't wail out ' wae's 't me ! '
When spirits tak off with one's shadows at night,
When t' laggard grains drop from t' uppermost glass ³
One kens one must stiffen beneath t' winding-sheet—
And besides, lass, I've sweared by t' nine sods on my grave,
By t' six men I met with no woman atween,

¹ Hidden.

² Woe is it to me.

³ The hour-glass.

Auld Nan of Sexhow

By t' nine nails that they fastened my coffin-lid down,
By her that they hugged late at night over t' green ;¹
've sworn by t' last bat that speaks a day gone,
've sworn, too, by t' ground where t' soulless yans lig²
By the shamed lass that ligs with a stake through her chest,
've sworn, Nan, I've sworn that Tom's grave they
shall dig.

Now don't you go greetin' and beg him to mend,
He won all he tried for, and flung you in the muck ;
Remember, I've sworn, lass, and the dead can't turn back.
He'd a chance given him for mending his luck."
Then as shadows depart when t' cannel burns out,
As the lightning flash blinds you and is then seen no more,
As the humming-moth slips as though coming our way,
The auld lass went as whist³ as an ullot⁴ in t' air.

That very same night as Tom sat in his chair,
With one legging undone in his hand,
Though as drunk as a pig, the great swab⁵ let it drop—
For he'd wit enough left to ken Nan.
Kenned her as pale as a frost-bleached sheet,
Aye, as white as a new-coloured house,
As light, and as airy as the hag rolls o'er fog,
And as whist as a cat waits for t' mouse.
Though Tom's tongue was tied, his lips parched and dry,
The fumes of the drink eased their hold of his brain,
And his eyes were held bound, as he fair gloored⁶ at
Nan—

Dumb-stricken he sat gripped with pain.

¹ A midnight burial.

² To lie.

³ Quietly.

⁴ Owl.

⁵ A dissolute fellow.

⁶ Stared.

Auld Nan of Sexhow

He knew that her coming meant no good for him,
He kenned, too, all the wrong he had done.
He tried for to swear at last he'd do right—
But too late!—for he found that she'd gone.
Aye! gone in a twinkling! aye! gone in trice!
She *said* nowt, she *did* nowt, but went as she came—
As whist as death's hand, when it opes in your track.

It was night in the market when young Nan found him out,
As gently she pleaded: "Oh, hearken to me!
There's the priest over there, Tom, ask a shriving from
him,

It maybe might be still the saving of thee."

She prayed, "I prithee *do* listen—it's not for my'sen—
Gan to him! gan to him, Tom, lad, I pray!"

But Flinders turned on her and called her a drab,
And folk shouted: "Shame on you this day."

Tom looked at them scowling, to learn 'em all sharp
That he wouldn't be youp'd at by none.

But all of a sudden they saw him look scared,
And whispered: "There's summat he's seen."

Never one word did Tom Flinders breathe,
Though sober he staggered that day,

He just said to t' ostler: "Look sharp, Bob—my mare!"
Then he mounted and galloped away.

But those who were standing at Stokesley town-end
Saw a sight such as never was seen

By wick folk or dead folk, true-telled or a lie,
Told as real, or bad-dreamed as a dream.

As he raced past Nan's house over t' doorstone there
bounced

Auld Nan of Sexhow

Not *young* Nan, but Auld Nan, 'twas clear ;
As folk watched t' auld lass took one leap behind Tom,
It was she that had been dead a year !
When Tom felt her arms 'twin'd fast round his neck
He fair skrieked out with fear : " Nan, I will !
Nobbut give me yah chance, it's God's truth, Nan, I
swear ! "

But for t' clatter of t' hoofs all was still.
" She's nipping his wezzan,¹ he can't youl," shouted one,
" She's brokken t' grave bonds for to kill."
And then far away, there rang out on t' night air
Wild wails of despair : " Nan, I will—will !—will ! "
They shouted to farmers homeward bound : " Speed
your tits
And overtake Flinders—Nan's wraith means him ill."
They kenned that by t' way his wezzan she nipped,
And by t' way Tom beeaed " Nan I will ! " " Nan I
will ! "

When they heard t' awesome wail, some stayed their
whip-hand ;
Chasing boggles they felt was a dangerous bat,
And if Flinders had gotten a spirit ahint
It was through his ill life—so they went their own yat.²
And those who were wending their way home on foot
Stood, flayed out of their wits, as Flinders flew by,
Scared like, shroud pale, with a face drawn by dread,
They shook to their marrow as they heard the wild cry :
" *Nan, I will, Nan, I will—It's God's truth, Nan, I will.*"
Then baskets and parcels all slipped on to t' ground,
For the shadow that clung round his neck they all kenned ;

¹ Windpipe.

² Gate, course, road.

Auld Nan of Sexhow

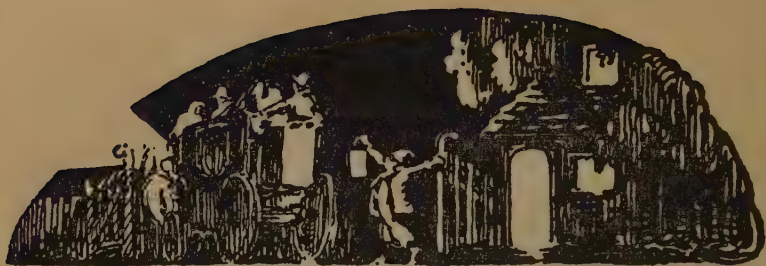
Some trembled and signed with the cross I'll be bound,
Some called on the Virgin, and some on the Lord !
Some staggered fair dazed, some laid where they fell,
Full length on the turnpike, not minding a jot
If Auld Nan and Flinders rode straight into Hell.
It curdled their blood, as they hearkened to t' wail ;
They dare not go forward, they dare not turn back,
They felt chained to t' spot by some underground power.
On Tommy raced—like a thing that was mad—
While tewing and fighting to get himself free
From fingers he couldn't grasp hold of at all,
Which now clutched his wezzan as tight as could be.
Then Bill Cass came along on his thoroughbred tit,
Folk begged him his hardest to ride for to save
Poor Tom from Nan's clutch, for they knew well that Bill
Feared nowt dead or wick, from Hell, Heaven, or t' grave.
“ Gan on ! ” they bawled out ; “ gan on, lad, for Tom's
Hard held with Nan's wraith, his life's in thy hand ;
Clap spurs to your mare, lad, and give her her head,
And ride like the Devil to free Tom from Nan.”

.
Then started a chase such as never was known
Afore in their wick, or t' auldest auld man
Could call to his mind, like they all saw that night,
When Bill on his blood tit spurred hard to catch Nan.
’Twas a short mile from Flinders, when Bill got a view
Of the twain making straight for Tommy's front door.
Bill whispered to t' tit : “ Noo, your best you must do,”
And then he yelled out : “ Keep your heart up ! I'm here !
Your old friend's behind you astride of blood Bess ;
Turn your mare round and join me—we'll soon do for Nan ;

Auld Nan of Sexhow

I'll scare any boggle that ere jumped a kirk wall.
Punch her in t' wind, lad, as hard as you can."
But Tom's mare kept her course straight for his front door,
And as Bill Cass drew nearer he saw Tom's face was black,
The two of 'em fighting like things fresh from Hell,
They twined and they twisted, yet neither one fell;
They might have been glued or tied to t' hoss back.
'Twas a sight that gave Bill such a shuthering shock,
That he half pulled his mare up, he was so clean 'mazed
At the way those two galloped and twisted so wick,
Lapping and unlapping, both of 'em did fick
Each other to best. Tom strove now fair crazed.
"My heart must not fail me," Bill said to himself,
"It's now, lad, or never," for somehow he knew
To do any good he must master all fear,
And catch 'em both up afore they reached the door;
Summat told him 'twas there the race it would end.
As Bill spurred his blood, Tom's wezzan Nan clutched,
Harder and harder each stride the mare made.
Tom turned once on Bill—a face swollen and black,
With tongue lolling out, his last fick he did mak'
To clash Nan to t' grund, but he might as well have
Stroven to shake his shadow away.
Bill saw it was overed. 'Twas plain to be seen
As Tom whemmelled ¹ on t' mare—he was deein'.
Though Bill lashed his tit, and spared not his spur,
'Twas all to no good, they still kept on ahead.
As they raced straight for t' house, Auld Nan she let out
A skrike fresh from t' grave—a parlous hell hoot—
And Tom dropped on his doorstone quite dead!

¹ Almost overbalanced.



xii. The Coach Ghost



In the days when almost every bridge and the point at which every four cross-roads met was invested by local tradition with a haunting spectre, there is small wonder that stories of "coach ghosts" along the Great North Road are abundant. It is not to be wondered at either that these same cross-roads and lonely heaths and commons should be awesome places to those who lived in a superstitious age. Were not the bodies of those who had taken their own lives ignominiously buried at the meeting-place of four cross-roads with stakes driven through them as if to keep them down? Were not those who attacked coaches, or held up single travellers, or stole a horse or sheep, hung in chains till their bones rattled in the wind, by the roadside on the common? . . . and have not bridges from earliest times been a place of resort of visitors from the great beyond?—why, the very farm waggoners, as well as the stage coachmen, carried whipstocks of "rowan tree," which made witch or spectre impotent would they fright or harm the horses and cast a spell upon either those who drove them or those whom they drove.

Most of the legends of "coach ghosts," both on the Great North Road and the less important coaching highways which joined it, as remembered to-day by even

The Coach Ghost

old folk, are often fragmentary—a bald statement of supposed (and often still believed) fact. It has been orally handed down that certain portions of the North Road—a stage on which so many dramas were played—had their own particular “spirits,” which for some good reason visited and revisited them. Of course coachmen, guards, and post-boys, as well as those living contiguous, all knew the tradition of every yard of the road. Most of the detail, and the primary *raison d’être*, has now been lost—more’s the pity!

One of the best and most complete of the old coach and coach-road ghost stories, which used to be told and treated as gospel, was related to my late father by a certain Peter Jackson, who was himself one of the cast in a great North Road drama in which ghosts, highwaymen, love, and abundant incident played an integral part. My father, fortunately, wrote the story down as narrated to him, so that I am able to give it almost verbatim from the lips of one long since dead.

Jackson and his brother-in-law boarded the coach at the Black Swan, Pickering, *en route* for York, whence they intended to catch the North mail coach early the following morning. It was a fine moonlight night as they rattled over Pickering’s cobble-stones—and now let Jackson tell his own story.

All went well until we had passed through Malton and got fairly on to the York Road, when suddenly the horses swerved and, both by their own initiative and the driver pulling them back on their haunches, stopped with such suddenness as nearly to overturn the coach. For a moment the coachman seemed spellbound, speechless, and

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terrified. He made no answer to the questions excitedly shouted to him by the inside passengers, who had been asleep, but, handing me the reins, jumped down from the box, made a show of examining the springs, and then announced that he would have to turn back and get the Malton blacksmith to look at them. When he had clambered on to the box again I said to him, "It was a near shave for that young woman on the road; another couple of yards and you would have been over her. . . . But what became of her? She'd gone when you went to look at the springs."

"Did *you* see her?" he asked, turning sharply to me. "Of course I did," I answered; "who could help it?" Then I called to the other outside passengers to ask if they hadn't also seen the young woman's narrow escape. To my astonishment none of them had except a lady, who replied to the incredulous and bantering remarks, "Indeed there *was* a young woman in front of the coach. I saw her quite plainly. . . . She seemed to be signalling to someone—I thought the driver." Then was it the coachman caused no small consternation when he added to this remark:

"The young miss is right. . . . There *was* something in the roadway, and that something—the spirit of a lass—*was* signalling to me. I have seen her before, and my father saw her many times both when driving this and other stages. Long years since my grandfather hoped to make that lass, when she was in the flesh and the beauty of all Ryedale, his wife, but it was one of them things which warn't to be. The tale is over long to tell. . . . It warn't to be." Further questions were put to an end

The Coach Ghost

s the coach pulled up in front of the Black Horse, in Yorkersgate, Malton. The situation was soon explained and the horses taken out. As luck would have it, the blacksmith was one of the party who foregathered at the inn to learn what untoward incident had occurred to bring the coach back. He was a lifelong friend of the driver, and adjourned with him and the guard to the privacy of the saddle-room, where the whole story, together with what it was believed to portend, was told him. On returning to the inn he was heard to say, "Leave it to me and two or three chaps I'll fetch in a few minutes. I know a few amongst the company inside the house now who can use their fists and a pistol too, and who'll only be too glad to have a try for a dead or alive highwayman reward."

So the coachman on finding his passengers in the bar addressed them thus: "I'm in no ways certain about the safety of the coach. . . . Anything might happen. I'd advise all those who can do so to stay here the night and go on in the morning with the Malton coach to York. If any of you have valuables about you you'll take my advice. There's queer things happening to-night; they've happened before, and I know that they mean summat unpleasant." So mysterious and cryptic were his words that we all decided to remain where we were rather than face the unknown terrors and dangers at which he had hinted—at least all of us but a young, well-dressed buck, who said, "You may all do what you please. I am due in York to-night, and in York I mean to be," leaving the bar as he spoke. "We've kenned him," remarked the coachman, adding mystery to

The Coach Ghost

mystery. "If you want to see a bit of fun, gents, come outside."

"And so, young sir, you are determined to go on to York in spite of my warning," said the coachman at the doorway. "Well, then, I'm sure the guard will allow you to ride inside with these new passengers. . . . I'm sure they'll be able to protect you should anything happen."

"I prefer to ride outside! . . . Guard, set the steps," replied the insistent traveller.

"If you go with this coach, sir, you'll go *inside*," reiterated the coachman in a voice suggestive of finality, holding the door open for the youth to step in. This, however, he declined to do, so the driver beckoned to the blacksmith and his armed party, who thereupon took their seats. Bang went the door, up clambered coachman and guard to their seats. "Let go their heads," shouted the former, and the coach was soon lost to sight, leaving the obviously suspect traveller playing a tattoo upon his high boots in his rage.

.
The erstwhile passengers were soon seated round a blazing fire, and when mine host joined them one of the party said, "Landlord, what's the mystery about the gentleman who wanted to travel outside when given the chance to go in? . . . And what's become of him?"

"The young gentleman," replied the landlord, knocking the ash out of his churchwarden, "is at the present moment lying upon his back with a broken head, and his leg chained to the wall in a loose box where yesterday we had a badger fastened. That is where the *gentleman* is. It's where he'll stay, too, till to-morrow morning. The

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mystery is this: the coachman was jealous¹ of him at Pickering, and had cause to be still more so on the way, whilst our blacksmith was certain he recognised him. So, just before he left the bar, the driver whispered to me, Nance pointed that chap out to me to-night with a warning finger. You'll see he won't ride inside with the smith and the armed chaps he's going to bring, and, as like as not, he'll try and follow us on one of your horses.

. . . Keep an eye on him if you value your cattle—and maybe our lives.' . . . That's the mystery, gentlemen. The new badger is in league with some of the highway gentry, and was anxious to give them the signal that the coach was an easy prey and worth the catching, and to have his pistol at the driver's head as soon as ever his friends made their appearance. As soon as the coach had gone I found him in my stables, and the lads in the yard soon had him in hand. . . . And there he lies thinking things over!"

.

The coach *was* stopped near to Barton corner, and the three masked assailants were so astounded at the reception they received that they proved an easy capture. They were bundled into the coach by the smith and his companions, who continued the journey as escort to York, there to claim the reward offered for these highwaymen's apprehension, when he of their number deputed to ride one of the captured horses and lead the other two, arrived later in the morning.

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And now to return to the Black Horse at Malton.

¹ Suspicious.

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Here the coach party, too excited with recent happenings to think of bed, had revealed to them the key to what had occurred.

“What do I mean when I say that ‘Nance’ pointed our prisoner out? Well, if you would care to hear a curious story, I can tell you one which will answer the question and interest you at the same time.”

The Betrayal of Nance.

“I remember,” mine host began, “hearing of Nance when I was quite a lad. The grandfather of the driver who brought you here to-night was at one time a hind at Sheriff-Hutton. It was then he fell in love with a farmer’s daughter, called ‘Nance.’ The lovers were great favourites, and all looked forward to their wedding day. But it was not to be. When the day was actually fixed for their marriage, there came to the village a young dandy, dressed in all the latest o’ fashion, who flung his brass about as if it had no end. He looked a gentleman, and he behaved like one, save being honourable, for soon he made love to Nance. Many of the folk told him to his face that Nance was ommaist as good as wed, and that he ought to let her alone. But the young master just laughed at them, saying, ‘All’s fair in love and war.’ To Nance he flattered and lied, making all sorts of sport of the less-polished Tom. He told Nance that she was born to grace a lady’s gown, and not a drudge’s apron, and, like many another silly country lass, she listened to his blandishments, till in the end she told Tom she could no longer claim his honest love, and that she had come to feel she could never be happy as a poor man’s wife. She

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made him forget her, and find some other girl more worthy of his affection.

“Tom begged her to wait until he found out who and what her new lover might be. This Nance promised to do, and Tom left the village next day on his secret mission. Before he returned, however, Nance was wedded and no one—no one knew whither. At first Tom almost lost his wits, but he managed to pull himself together after a few weeks. A year or two before he had driven one of the mail coaches, and, feeling that the roving life would suit him better in his present state of mind, he was soon in the box again tooling a coach between York and Hull. Well then, gentlemen” (mine host continued, looking round as if to call special attention to what he was about to say), “a twelvemonth after he had started to drive his coach, one summer night he noticed sitting by the roadside a young woman, nursing a baby. He was then about five miles from York, and well up to time. The woman rose as he drew near her, lifting her hands towards him as if in supplication, at the same time in a broken voice begging him to stop. He saw it was Nance, looking wan and weary, with death written upon her face. Did he pull up, gents? Did he take any notice of the wench who had treated him so cruelly? Aye, that he did. He called to the guard to catch hold of the leaders’ heads, and was himself soon off the coach and by her side, supporting her fainting form in his strong arms.

“‘Nance, my poor lass, what is the matter?’ he cried, for she had slipped from his arms on to her knees upon the turnpike. ‘Get up, my lass,’ said Tom, his words choked with emotion. ‘Oh, Tom!’ she sobbed, ‘I

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am not worthy that you should look at me, but I'm dying, Tom. For the love you once had for me, I——'

"But she got no further. Opening the coach door, he said in a voice filled with tears, 'Ladies' (there were but two inside passengers), 'for the love of God, be kind to her; we shall soon be at York, and then I'll see to her comfort. She was once to have been my wife, but——' And then Tom broke down, closed the door, and next moment was making up lost time. The landlady of the York Tavern (a Mrs Pulleyn) tended the girl as if she had been her own daughter. Bit by bit Nance told a sad and sordid story of the scoundrel who, by his lies and flattery, had blinded her eyes to Tom's true love. She had discovered he was a gentleman born, but a penniless younger son of a great family, who, like many others of his type, had turned highwayman. Moreover, she had found too late he was already a married man at the time he had wed her. The moment this terrible fact became known to her—it was all no news to Tom—she had fled from his house. She had learnt that a coach driven by Tom would pass along the York Road, and had patiently waited his coming.

"'You'll care for my bairn when I'm gone, Tom, won't you?' she pleaded in a feeble whisper, when she had told her tale of sorrow and shame. 'Aye, lass,' promised the kindly hearted Tom. 'I'll be a father to the bairn.' . . . And Nance knew the promise would be faithfully kept.

"'Tom,' she whispered.

"'Aye, lass, what is it?'

"'It's time you went—kiss me afore you go, and whisper

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ou forgive me. We shall not speak to each other again on earth.' Winding her arms about him, she continued : But if my spirit be allowed to return, I will always warn you, your childer—for you must wed some true lass—and your childer's children, of any coming danger. Good-bye.'

"Tom never saw Nance again alive. She died a few hours after he left her. Now comes the strange part of the story. About two years after Nance's death, Tom was sent to Durham to take charge of a special coach requiring an extra skilful driver, and bring it as far as York, where he would receive further orders. There were just four passengers—all gents of high degree. Tom had a hint given him that one was a bishop, one a duke, and the other two were noblemen, all on secret business connected with the King and Parliament. Circumstances arose that these gents could not leave Durham till later than expected, and it was most urgent they should be in York at a certain time. Just after Tom had climbed on to the box one of the gents called to him from the window :

" 'Have you made all arrangements, coachman ? You have not one minute to waste.'

" 'Yes sir ; there's a post-boy on in front and fresh horses, and the best will be ready with their sheets off at every stage.'

" 'Right ! Then let's hear the crack of your whip, and remember, if you get us into York by eight chimes, there's a guinea apiece from each of us.' Up went the window, Tom gave his team their heads, and away they went.

"All went well until they started on their last stage—

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ten good miles from York. It was there Tom got his first bit of bad news from the driver of a passing chaise. He learnt there was a heavy fog settling over York, which was spreading northward like a sheet every minute. 'What's that he says?' asked one of the gentlemen, letting down the window. Tom repeated the bad news, adding, 'I have five minutes to spare now, but I shall soon lose what I have gained if the fog has reached but two miles out of York.' But the fresh horses were in and away they went. Before they had travelled three miles Tom's heart sank—even then they were driving into the fog, and, if it became worse, it meant creeping along, and all chance of reaching York by eight was gone. Denser and denser it grew, and he dare not keep up the pace he was going much longer, as he was then risking all their lives. It was just as he caught hold of the leaders to steady them Tom saw a figure take its seat by his side. It came to him out of the mist and seemed to take its form from the curling grey land-low clouds. He instinctively knew it was Nance even before her hands were laid lightly upon the reins. The instant she did so the leaders sprang into a gallop again. On, on they went, the coach swinging from side to side. On, on, faster and yet faster; safely passing the lumbering carrier's waggons pulled up close to the roadside to give room to what for many a long day was spoken of as 'the phantom coach,' whose horn the guard sounded till the very veins on his forehead were like to burst. At its warning blasts wide open flew the turnpike gates, the toll-gatherer standing filled with wonderment and awe at the flying coach and at the pale faces staring through the open

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window upon which the light from their lanterns shone for one brief moment. Those within the coach had ceased to expostulate. They had shouted to Tom until they were hoarse to drive more steadily. . . . On, on they tore through the fog, now so dense that it was impossible to see a yard in front. Tom, however, had now no fear. Against his own hands he felt cold but gentle fingers gripping the reins. Once, and only once, he shouted to the now terrified passengers, 'You have no cause to fear, gentlemen, you'll be safe—and in York before eight chimes.'

"He heeded not the retort of one of them: 'Pull up, you fool; we'd rather be late as dashed to pieces. You shall have your four guineas anyway.'

"On the coach rattled, and it was not until the clatter and jolting of the cobble-stones beneath the wheels told Tom that he was actually safe in York city, that he felt the touch of those magic marble hands had vanished. A few moments later his foam-flecked team was drawn up at the sign of narrow Coney Street's Black Swan.

"'You are here, sirs, and a good five minutes to spare,' said Tom, wiping his face as he opened the door. 'I told you you'd be here in time; and, gentlemen, if you knew all that I know you would have felt there was no reason to fear.' Tom pocketed his four guineas, and, as he walked after his horses up the spacious Swan yard, he murmured, 'Poor Nance! poor Nance!'"

Mine host concluded:

"Several times after that Nance helped Tom out of awkward situations, and when the day came for Tom's son to take his father's place, the old man gave him this

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advice. Said he: 'And last of all, Tom—and there's nowt about driving a coach which is of more consequence than this—think on, if ever you are in a fix and you find yourself beat, and Nance comes to your help, let her have her way; trust both coach, cattle, and yourself to her. You'll pull through all right, take my word for it. Think on,' continued old Tom, 'if she signals you to stop—*stop*, my lad. If ever she takes hold of the ribbons—let *her* drive.'

"That is my story, gentlemen, and that explains what Tom meant when he said he had a warning finger pointed to the buck who is now chained by the leg in my yard."





xiii. Bonny Bona ❧ ❧ ❧

William Scorer, who was born in 1799 at Basedale Abbey and died at Masham in 1886, was a most interesting link between the old coaching era and more modern times. A wool and cattle dealer, in his early days he did much travelling ere yet the roads were quite free from highwaymen and footpads. His journeys necessitated his spending many nights at wayside hostels along the Great North Road, and, no doubt, like many others, he spent these evenings with the jovial company who foregathered at the coaching and posting houses and listened to the dramas of the road which they told so graphically. Fortunately, William Scorer did not merely listen to local tradition, he took an early opportunity of committing to writing the narratives he heard ; some exciting, some pregnant with local lore, others traceable to the sagas brought over by the Norsemen of yore.

The bulky manuscript book in which he recorded these stories which served to entertain more than one generation of travellers, he lent to my late father, who carefully copied many legends of witches and fairies, of bad dwarfs and good elves, of haunted roads and houses, of spectral coaches and very real highwaymen, together with strange incidents which formed a part of the poetry

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of the road—a poetry which has never belonged to the rail “steam-pot,” despised by Egerton Warburton.

One of these stories—full of romance, love, drama, and incident—had its birth in 1819, when Scorer was a stripling of twenty. On Christmas Eve, in 1819, the last coach northward ran foul of a lumbering carrier’s waggon in the dark near York Gate, a well-known coaching inn on that part of the Great North Road known as “The Street.” A badly damaged wheel and broken pole was the result, and though there was a spare pole on the coach the other injuries made it unavoidable that the passengers should spend the night at York Gate. However irritating this might be, and probably was, there was possibly some recompense in listening to the following thrilling love story which, with some little emendation, is here given as recorded in William Scorer’s quill-penned MS. book :

The Salutation Inn, on the Low Street, had one of the best ordered cockpits which could be found anywhere in the north. Dukes and lords and gentry from all parts used to gather there, and it is said that whole estates were won and lost, and fortunes signed away as the result of what were known as “The Salutation Cockings.” Possessing no daughters of his own the jovial landlord was fortunate in having a niece who lived with him, and she undoubtedly formed an additional attraction to the old hostelry. Bona Braithwaite was as comely a maiden as could be found between York and Newcastle, and her charms and figure constituted one of the toasts of the young bucks of her day. It is said that Bona had more than one chance of becoming “my lady,” but she knew

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her own place and kept it, just as she kept all the roystering gallants who visited her uncle's house in theirs. They knew exactly how far they might go with their jest and frolic, and woe to him who overstepped the mark. Now there were two local lads who were honest suitors for her hand—both farmer's sons with the prospect of one day being set up on holdings of their own. One was Tom Hoggett, the other Charles Lancaster, and at last Charles won the day and became Bona's accepted lover.

For some time all went well with the lovers . . . and then something happened! At first folk thought it was only a sweetheart's quarrel which would be forgotten like the dew of the morning at sunrising. But it proved more serious. Indeed, it ended in Charlie being dismissed, to the amazement of everyone, and Hoggett becoming first favourite. Bona, it seems, had heard compromising stories and was proud; he was hot-tempered; no explanation was asked for or given by either; and, in the end, after a fierce quarrel they parted.

After a while, when Bona and Hoggett were spoken of as likely to wed, it fell out that "Mother Harker," an old dame who tramped the country selling dream-charts, love-charms, telling fortunes, and forecasting events, visited the district. If all be true one hears, this old body made some wonderful prognostications, and actually *did* foretell many an event which afterwards came to pass.

It happened that just after Bona had quarrelled with Lancaster and taken up with Hoggett, she and a new-made friend—a Miss Jenny Parker, who had recently taken rooms at The Salutation—met "Mother Harker" when out walking together.

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“A good day to you, fair maidens,” said the old gypsy. “Come, lend me your hands, and cross my own with silver, and I’ll forecast your future. I’ll picture you your husbands, and tell you how many bairns will round your table go. I will warn you of those who would work you ill, and whisper a word of caution in your ear as to those whom you should watch with a jealous eye. You shall learn which are your lucky days, and those upon which evil will cast a shadow across your path. . . . A pretty palm, forsooth, and clear to read as a book,” said she, taking Bona’s white hand in her own brown one, and turning it palm upwards. “Will you hear the truth, my pretty maid? or am I only to tell those things which will please a maiden’s ear?”

“The truth, please, good dame,” answered Bona with a smile.

“As you will! There is danger across your path and nigh at hand. I see blood also, but the line ends not in blood but water. Twice thine heart has been assailed, but thy head and not thy heart has led thee astray. Thy guardian angel must have been far from thee when thou cast off thy old love for the new. I see great confusion and mystery and some sorrow, but there is happiness at the end.”

Taking Jenny’s hand the wrinkled old gypsy said: “Thou hast given thy hand to one who is as true as steel. Nevertheless there are lines about thy wedding which even I cannot read. That which thou hast in hand now will bring gold to thee, death to one, and life to another. To turn back now would mean death to him who should live.”

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And so they left the old dame, each lost in thought. Jenny, feeling she had an opening, spoke plainly to Bona, and not only told her she thought she had made a grave mistake to break with Lancaster, but also that she did not either like or trust Hoggett. The words of the seer had agitated Bona much. She was in no frame of mind to brook interference, and answered curtly: "Hadn't you better wait till you are asked for your opinion before you offer it so freely? . . . *Why* don't you trust Tom?" But her companion only shook her head mysteriously, at which Bona hazarded a shaft. "I believe," she said, "you are more than half in love with Tom yourself and want to set me against him. After what you have said I feel we cannot continue our friendship or live under the same roof, so you had better seek rooms elsewhere."

"As you wish," replied Miss Parker quietly. "One day you will find that I only tried to serve you." That same afternoon a cart came for Miss Parker's luggage, Hoggett's stepmother having, not very readily, agreed to take the young lady as paying guest. For the next week or two gossip was very busy linking together the names of Tom Hoggett and his stepmother's lodger. Tom's visits to Bona were much less frequent, he always seemed anxious to make them as short as possible, and to have pressing engagements elsewhere. Bona was piqued, and at last taxed her lover with having walked out with Miss Parker. This Tom denied, whereupon Bona gave him the lie direct, having herself seen the twain together. "If I'm to be spied on we had better have no more to say to each other," he retorted, rather viciously slapping his boot with his riding-whip, and departed. That same

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day Bona learnt that Hoggett had deliberately lied to her to poison her mind against his rival Lancaster. . . . And then she hated the man who had doubly played her false.

Towards evening she saw her old sweetheart passing the door on his return from Bedale market and beckoned him in. With real contrition and humility she told him the whole story, and begged his forgiveness as she wound her soft arms insinuatingly round his neck. . . . What man could resist such pleading ? He sealed his forgiveness with a kiss !

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It should have been mentioned that some time before Miss Parker's arrival, an elderly gentleman and his daughter met with an unpleasant experience whilst being driven along The Street in a leisurely manner. They were enjoying the panorama which stretched out before them—the Cleveland range of hills in the distance, and the nearer Hambletons on the one side, and those of Wensleydale on the other. When they reached one of the lanes turning down to the Swale, they noticed a horseman dismounted and apparently busy readjusting his saddle. His horse was restive and walking on as he was tightening his girths, so that the post-boy called to him to make way. When the chaise reached the horseman he dropped the saddle-flap which had hidden his face, and, to the dismay of the girl and the terror of the post-boy, they saw that he wore a black silken mask—the badge of “ the gentlemen of the road.”

“ Dismount,” the stranger called to the boy ; and then, turning to the occupants of the chaise, he said : “ And

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now, sweet maiden, I must claim toll from both of you—your purses, chains, watches, and rings will be safer in my keeping. Who knows but what you might meet some bad man along this road who would take your life for them. Don't keep me waiting! I am by nature impatient." The old man was too infirm to make any resistance, the post-boy was in terror and tears, so that there was nothing for it but to hand over such valuables as the travellers possessed. Just as the thief was about to mount and away with his booty, he caught sight of a thin gold chain circling the lady's neck. Without making any request for its removal he roughly seized the chain and tried to drag it off. "If you will wait a moment I will loosen it for you, it is fastened by a spring button," quietly explained the lady. "Then let me act the part of maid to you, my love," replied the highwayman, leering into her face so that she could feel his warm breath. Without more ado he rudely tore away her cape and bodice, unclasped the chain with its peculiar pendant attached, the while gloating over her discomfiture and blushes. Bowing with mock courtesy, he said: "It is unkind to cover up such charms—a neck and shoulders such as yours were never meant to be hid." He added some coarse remarks, and, though burning with indignation at conduct so unlike what she had believed to be characteristic of the knights of the road, the maiden quietly pleaded for the return of the pendant. "It is of no value to you; to me and mine it means much apart altogether from the miniature of my mother which it contains." This brought the reply: "You ought to be thankful I am not searching you further to see if there is

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anything else you have forgotten, and to peep again at those hidden charms. As for the picture . . . I want that to wear next my own heart to remind me of you." With this the highwayman rode away.

This robbery was followed by others, including an attack upon two old ladies who had been to Ripon to draw a considerable sum of money from the bank. They took a dish of tea with some friends at Dishforth, who persuaded them to leave their bag of guineas to be brought to them on the morrow. Between Dishforth and Azenby (where they lived) they were held up, and so infuriated was their assailant at being baulked of his expected prize, that he shot their horse dead and left them to reach home as best they could on foot. There now seemed little doubt that it must be either someone living in the district, or possessing confederates who supplied him with local information, who was patrolling this part of the Great North Road. The authorities at York were pressed to renew their activities to bring the pest to book. They sent officers down who, dressed as drovers, pedlars, and tinkers, sat in tavern tap-rooms and questioned and listened to all and sundry. One night, whilst they were being held up with talk, another robbery was committed not a mile from the inn in which they sat. A local farmer was compelled at the point of the pistol to hand over 180 guineas on the very night upon which Lancaster and Bona repledged their troth.

Once more the whole district was up in arms, and for a fortnight all manner of plans were devised and put into execution to secure both the culprit and the now increased reward offered for his capture. Then came a surprise to

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everyone. . . . A wandering tinker, who had spent the night in Lancaster's barn, discovered (he said whilst endeavouring to kill a rat) not only a black silk mask, but also sundry articles which were amongst the list of property the highwayman was known to have stolen. The tinker seemed to know exactly what course to take. By this time the identity of the law officers from York was known locally ; so he sought them out, showed them what he had discovered, and added that he was almost sure he had heard young Lancaster return home with his horse late on the night of the last robbery. This was quite sufficient for the men from York. They straightway arrested Charlie and took him to The Salutation to await the arrival of the York Mail. Before his departure Bona was allowed to have a private interview with him. Amongst the little group which saw him off was old "Mother Harker," who stood by the side of Bona—silent, inscrutable—till Bona, choking with her sobs, said : " Much may happen before they find him guilty." Then the old gypsy uttered these words :

"The lass is right ; much *will* happen both by blood and water before they find him—as they *will* find him—Not guilty."

Two days after Charlie Lancaster had been taken to York, Bona hurriedly left The Salutation, ostensibly to pay a long-promised visit to an aunt. It was commonly believed, however, that she had gone to York to be near her imprisoned sweetheart. The day after her departure a gentleman's servant arrived at The Salutation to order rooms for his master and mistress, whom, he more than hinted, were on a runaway-wedding tour, and had chosen

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The Salutation as being less frequented than the inns further on at Catterick. He whispered as a deep secret that his mistress was a lady of great fortune, who had with her jewels enough for a queen. Runaway weddings and hotly pursued brides *en route* for Gretna Green were not uncommon, but as all the world loves a lover, so they never lost their interest along the Great North Road. So was it that those who frequented The Salutation could talk of nothing else but the handsome and wealthy couple who were to spend the night there. Amongst those who discussed the matter was Tom Hoggett, who had to bear the brunt of a certain amount of chaff as to his own sweetheart having suddenly left the district and thrown him over. Tom tried to put the best face on the matter he could, and said Jenny was coming back in a day or two, and then they would be wed. He expressed his regret that he would not be able to stay to see the expected bride and bridegroom as business took him to Northallerton, but he would drop in later in the evening in the hope of catching a glimpse of them. "What time do you expect them, landlord?" he asked.

"Dinner is ordered for six sharp," was the reply. Shortly afterwards Tom departed.

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As the gossips sat over their mugs of beer at The Salutation, another scene was being enacted at an inn some miles up the road southwards. Four horsemen rode into the yard, an occurrence which would have called for nothing more than passing comment had it not been that one of the quartette was so conspicuously dressed—more as if for a levee than the road. The other three were

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Apparently ordinary travellers, maybe merchants or bagmen. It transpired that the dandy had sought their company for safety on the way, and had given no clue as to who he was. He wore a blue saxony coat, a full ruffled shirt, his chest being padded even beyond the bounds of the fashion of that day. His vest was of richly flowered silk, and his shapely leg and tiny feet encased in the smartest pair of riding-boots which ever stood in trees. A jewelled clasp glittered in his ruffle, his fingers shone with rings, and his fob hung heavy with valuable trinkets as well as seals. All this was duly noted by the company who had turned out of the house to "view" the new arrivals and their horses.

"Them's the sort o' gentry what fairly asks footpads to knock 'em on the head," remarked the blacksmith, who had stepped over the road from his forge for a closer inspection of the handsome young gallant he had seen ride by. "If he's the gentleman he looks it's a queer thing to me that he's riding without any servants or even saddle-bags. . . . Now mark my wo'ds there's summat queer about him!"

Eventually the three other horsemen went on their way, leaving their mysterious erstwhile companion, who remained half an hour or so longer and then also departed.

An hour or two later a farmer riding home found the apparently lifeless form of a fashionably dressed young gentleman lying upon the road. He was astounded on opening the frilled shirt of the recumbent youth, with a view to discovering if his heart was still beating, to find, not the square muscular chest of a man, but the whiter rounder bosom of a maiden, who, as he laid back the

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frills and took a closer look, he recognised as the lovely Bona.

Fortunately her uncle's hostel was not far down the road, and tenderly lifting Bona to the roadside, he galloped away for assistance. When those who hastened to render aid arrived, they found the injured girl had regained consciousness and was endeavouring to staunch the blood flowing from an ugly wound at the back of her head. Half an hour later the news arrived that the whole countryside was strong on the scent of the highwayman who had thus added to his many crimes. Never had there been such excitement within and without the sign of The Salutation as on that evening.

The bride and bridegroom had arrived amid all this commotion half an hour late. They, also, had been called upon to halt, and, according to various reports, were in some way connected with a plot for securing this Knight of the Road. Indeed, it was said that they would have effected his capture had not the suspicion of the masked man been suddenly aroused, causing him to turn his horse about and gallop away across country.

Presently mine host brought word to those assembled in the bar parlour that "the gent in the private room" had promised some time during the evening to give a true account of what had really happened to Bona, to himself, and his wife that afternoon.

At that moment Tom Hoggett joined the company and at once announced that strange tales were being told along the road from there to Allerton. "It seems," he added, "they haven't got the highwayman after all when they arrested Charlie Lancaster." At this point the

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strange gentleman quietly entered, closed the door after him, and placed a chair in front of it. He began :

“ Well, gentlemen, I know you are anxious to learn the actual facts of all the exciting events which have occurred this afternoon. First, let me relieve your minds by telling you that the doctor now states that Bona, one of the victims, as you are aware, of to-day’s drama, is now quite out of danger. But for a most unfortunate occurrence the scoundrel responsible for her injuries would have been captured. You have now doubtless heard that a plan was laid for his capture, and that it all but succeeded. Now let me explain how it came about that such a scheme was ever formulated, and how my wife and myself came to take part in it. To make this quite plain to you, I must hark back to that afternoon when an old man and his daughter were robbed not far from this very house. On that occasion the despicable hound did not content himself with robbery, he subjected the young lady both to violence and coarse remarks. That young lady is now my wife ! She was staying in the district, and was impressed by a remark she heard made on several occasions later that it was no regular highwayman who had acted towards her as did the hound who held them up, but someone living hereabouts. As you may remember, the thief tore from the breast of the young lady a much-valued miniature of her mother, which, for reasons I need not enter into, it was absolutely essential should be recovered. The trinket had a secret value, and *holds* a secret too. Sometime afterwards my wife’s sister came to stay in these parts in the hope of discovering information which would lead to the detection of the thief.

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Link by link a certain clue was followed up, and I began to form a plan and lay a trap for the capture of the culprit. Before that plan was completed the young fellow Lancaster was arrested. I need not say to you, who have known him all his life, that he is innocent. His sweetheart, who has this day been nearly done to death, also wished to assist in the discovery of my wife's locket, on hearing from her that she was convinced Lancaster had had no hand in the robberies, and that to find the locket would be to unmask the real culprit. So the plan of "the wealthy runaway couple" was devised, and, as arranged, Bona mounted her mare and rode to York. There she procured the disguise of a young gentleman of fashion, and set out on her homeward journey. She thought, and rightly, that the highwayman would be on the look out to waylay us, so she decided to ride a little way in front of our chaise, so as to present herself as a tempting bait. Her plan was, when "handing over," to snatch the mask from her assailant's face, well knowing that if it was anyone living in these parts she would recognise him. It was a mad and dangerous resolve of which my wife and I knew nothing. Only one determined to sacrifice herself for the man she loved would ever have carried out so daring a device for unmasking a villain. The brave girl failed to carry out her scheme, not because her heart failed her, but because the coward attacked her from behind, bringing her senseless to the ground. Then he robbed his victim and left her to die." At this point a note was handed in to the speaker. Hastily reading it, he continued :

"My story is now complete. . . . The final chapter has

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must come to hand ! Some time ago Bona arranged with our local smith to so mark a shoe when next a certain horse came to his forge, that its imprint could be easily detected and sworn to." As the speaker made this last statement a vision of feminine loveliness entered. Circling her white throat was a thin gold chain from which hung upon her snowy bosom a jewelled locket. One man in that company more than the rest stared with wondering eyes. "It's Jenny !" he gasped ; and turning hastily pale he clutched his seat. Dramatically was the tense silence broken when "Jenny"—for it *was* her they had known as such—spoke :

"I sought the shelter of your roof, Tom Hoggett, so that I might search for this (tapping the locket on her bosom). I didn't find it, but it has come to *me*, as *you* have come to us. You had your horse shod this morning, and, thanks to Bona, every stride it took after you so cruelly attacked her and galloped off across country, brought you a step nearer to the gallows. The hoof-marks were followed, and though they were lost on the grass they were found again on the plough, and traced to our very stable door. And those who tracked you, like hounds running a fox, entered your house but found their quarry had gone. They searched and found more than enough to hang you, including this pendant. I told my husband in the note which he has just read that I had the pendant on my bosom and he had the chief within his grasp."

Hoggett sat dumb, speechless, and dazed. He never moved his eyes from the fatal locket as it rose and fell. It seemed to fascinate him with hidden mesmeric power.

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The spell was soon broken, however, for "Jenny" opened the door and admitted three strangers—the very three who had ridden with Bona that morning. When they had entered she pointed towards Hoggett, and said: "There stands the coward and thief whom you have hunted—seize him." Tom with the yell of a madman sprang like a wild beast at his accuser, but he was soon overpowered and handcuffed. The mail was due in half an hour, and it was decided that he should be taken to York by it. Although the three officers knew they had a desperate man to deal with, and took every precaution, they did not bargain for an attempt at rescue. Just when the coach was drawing up they hurried their man out, and at that moment a party of tinkers—amongst them he who had found the mask and stolen property in Lancaster's barn—rushed forward, tripped up those who held Hoggett, and in a second the prisoner had vanished into the darkness. One of the rescuers was seized, and admitted that Hoggett's mother had paid them to act as they had done, and that they had been in league with the vanished highwayman and receivers.

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Next morning, ere the sun had risen, a fisherman set out for the River Swale to draw in his night-lines, and at the sharp curve which the river takes near to Langton village, he saw the body of Hoggett—the plaything of a whirlpool. . . . He had defeated the hangman, but as "Mother Harker" had more than once cryptically predicted, had met his death by water! This place was for long years after known as "Hoggett's Hole," and the

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belief was held that anyone who fell or drifted into that fatal spot was irrevocably doomed.

Of course Lancaster was set at liberty, and Bona and he were wed shortly after. Their descendants are living to this day, and it is said that Bona's winsome face and symmetry of limb and figure is yet to be found in all the Lancaster maidens who are of true descent.

Note

There are two fords across the Swale near Langton. One leads to Killerby, the other to Kirby Fleetham. Possibly in the darkness the fugitive missed these and, handicapped by the shackles round his wrists, was drowned in the hole to which he gave his name.





xiv. “*Swift Nick*”

The Highwayman

Some men become noted, some become notorious. Even the fame of infamy seems transient, and the disputed claim as to the birthplace of the daring highwayman, William Nevison, crops up yearly as a hardy annual. To him, at any rate, belongs an undying name, though it is passing strange that there is so much uncertainty regarding his early career and life. Of his death there is ample evidence, for he was hanged on York's Knavesmire on March 15, 1684, fifty-five years anterior to Dick Turpin meeting a similar fate on the same well-named and historic ground. Nevison paid the penalty for his misdeeds before his equally picturesque successor was born; yet fact and tradition respecting the twain have been so confused by later-day historians as to make them appear almost one and the same person. Indeed this has more than once been stated to be the case though there is abundant irrefutable evidence that both had a “separate existence” though there was much similarity both in their life and death. Turpin, of whom more later, was born Richard Turpin and as Richard Turpin he died. William Nevison—the “Swift Nick” of a hundred thrilling stories and ballads—is believed

“*Swift Nick*” *The Highwayman*

to have adopted an *alias*. In *The Records of York Castle* (p. 246) amongst the notes on “Notorious Criminals,” we find it stated :

“It appears that John Nevison’s real name was John Brace, or Bracy, that he originally belonged to Agnes Burton, having an uncle thereabouts, and that he was married, his wife living beyond Pontefract. . . . Brace, Bracy, or Nevison, chiefly ‘worked’ in Yorkshire. . . . Charles II. christened him ‘Swift Nick.’ He was never charged with murder—only with attempting it ; and the only occasion on which he shed blood was when a butcher with some half-dozen people were bent upon his capture, and he had to use his pistols in self-defence, and the butcher suffered.”

Defoe, in his *Tour through Britain*, gives Nevison another *alias*—that of “Nicks”—prior to the supposed Royal christening by Charles II. Here is Defoe’s story :

“From Gravesend we see nothing remarkable on the road but Gad’s Hill, a noted place for robbing of seamen after they have received their pay at Chatham. Here it was that the famous robbery was committed in the year 1676. It was about four o’clock in the morning when a gentleman was robbed by one Nicks, on a bay mare, just on the declining part of the hill, on the west side, for he swore to the spot and to the man. Mr Nicks, who robbed him, came away to Gravesend, was stopped by the difficulty of the boat, and of the passage, near an hour, which was a great discouragement to him, but was a kind of bait to his horse. From thence he rode across the county of Essex, through Tilbury, Horndon, and Bilerecay to Chelmsford ; here he stopped about half an

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hour to refresh his horse, and give him some balls ; from thence to Braintre, Bocking Wethersfield ; then over the downs to Cambridge, and from thence, keeping still the cross roads, he went by Fenny Stanton to Godmanchester and Huntingdon, where he baited himself and his mare about an hour. Then, holding on the north road, and keeping a full larger gallop most of the way, he came to York the same afternoon, put off his boots and riding cloaths, and went dressed as if he had been an inhabitant of the place, not a traveller, to the bowling-green, where, among other gentlemen, was the Lord Mayor of the city ; he, singling out his Lordship, studied to do something particular that the Mayor might remember him by, and accordingly lays some odd bet with him concerning the bowls then running, which should cause the Mayor to remember it the more particularly, and takes occasion to ask his Lordship what o'clock it was ; who, pulling out his watch, told him the hour, which was a quarter before or a quarter after eight at night. Some other circumstances, it seems, he carefully brought into their discourse which should make the Lord Mayor remember the day of the month exactly, as well as the hour of the day. Upon a prosecution which happened afterwards for this robbery, the whole merit of the case turned upon this single point. The person robbed swore as above to the man, to the place, and to the time, in which the fact was committed—namely, that he was robbed on Gad's Hill in Kent, on such a day, and at such a time of the day, and on such a part of the hill, and that the prisoner at the bar was the man that robbed him. Nicks, the prisoner, denied the

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facts, called several persons to his reputation, alleged that he was as far off as Yorkshire at that time, and that particularly, the day whereon the prosecution swore he was robbed, he was at bowles on the public green in the city of York; and to support this he produced the Lord Mayor of York to testify that he was so, and that the Mayor acted so and so with him there as above. This was so positive and so well attested that the jury acquitted him on a bare supposition that it was impossible the man could be at two places so remote on one and the same day. There are more particulars related of this story, such as I do not take upon me to affirm—namely, that King Charles II. prevailed on him, on assurance of pardon and that he should not be brought into any further trouble about it, to confess the truth to him privately, and that he own'd to His Majesty that he committed the robbery, and how he rode the journey after it, and that upon this the King gave him the name or title of *Swift Nicks* instead of *Nicks*.”

So far as I know Defoe is alone in describing Nevison as “*Mr Nicks*,” just as the *York Castle Records* (which *should* be accurate) and the *Heywood Diaries* (see *post*) are the only instances in which Nevison is described as “*John*.” Regarding the particular robbery to which Defoe refers, the *Surtees Society Publications* (Vol. xl) state that Nevison was condemned and sentenced in March 1676 (not acquitted), “but was reprieved together with a woman named Jane Nelson, in the expectation that he would discover his accomplices. The hope was a vain one, and he was drafted into a regiment destined for Tangiers, from which he quickly

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deserted and resumed his old career.” Already, then, we begin to find how contradictory are the statements made regarding a character whose name was known from one end of England to the other, though his operations, as stated in a quotation *ante*, seem to have been mainly confined to Yorkshire. There was a reason for this. The highwaymen of yore of necessity had friends who would provide food, shelter, and, on occasion, concealment, for themselves and their horse. They also had receivers and others whom it paid to succour them. As there was a pretty substantial reward always awaiting those who could effect their capture, the locality in which they “worked” was naturally restricted to that in which they had adequate arrangements for escape and concealment in case of “accident” and hue and cry. Not infrequently they had a change of ground for which they could make when things became too hot for them in one quarter, but they seem to have been pretty much like a rabbit—once off their own “run,” easily captured. True, their nomadic and adventurous temperament, more than a real love of crime for crime’s sake, possibly had much to do with their becoming “knights of the road.” This same temperament and affection for excitement often led them to take the risk of going far afield, like a February fox, and leaving behind them all the “bolt holes,” “smouting” places, and the friends upon whose good offices they could rely. The whole of the facts of Nevison’s life go to show that the fascination of the road was stronger than the opportunities he had of settling down to a safe, peaceful, and law-abiding life. As the call of the love-moon is undeniable to the February

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fox, of which I have spoken, and, as it takes him into the shadows of the night to unknown lands, so the thirst for the turnpike and to hear the clatter of hoofs and the rattle of the approaching mail coaches on the night air, was a magnetic influence to Nevison. That seems to have been the construction his fellow-Yorkshiremen put upon his activities—admiring him whilst praying that they might be spared a personal meeting. The following version of an old ballad is evidence of the abstract estimation in which Nevison was held :—

Bold Nevison, The Highwayman

Did you ever hear tell of that hero,
 Bold Nevison, that was his name ?
He rode about like a hero,
 And with that he gained great fame.

He maintained himself like a gentleman,
 Besides he was good to the poor ;
He rode about like a bold hero,
 And he gained himself favour therefore.

Oh ! the twenty-first of last month,
 Proved an unfortunate day ;
Capt. Milton was riding to London,
 And by mischance he rode out of his way.

He called at a house by the roadside,
 It was the sign of the Magpie,
Where Nevison he sat a-drinking,
 And the Captain soon did him espy.

“Swift Nick” The Highwayman

Then a constable very soon was sent for,
And a constable very soon came ;
With three or four more in attendance,
With pistols charged in the King’s name.

They demanded the name of this hero,
“ My name it is Johnson,” said he ;
When the Captain laid hold of his shoulder,
Saying : “ Nevison, thou goest with me.”

Oh ! then in this very same speech,
They hastened him fast away,
To a place called Swinington Bridge,
A place where they used to stay.

They called for a quart of good liquor,
It was the sign of the Black Horse,
Where there was all sorts of attendance,
But for Nevison it was the worst.

He call’d for pen, ink, and paper,
And these were the words that he said :
“ I will write for some boots, shoes, and stockings,
For of them I have very great need.”

’Tis now before my Lord Judge,
Oh ! guilty or not do you plead ;
He smiled unto the judge and jury,
And these were the words that he said :

“ I’ve not robb’d the poor of twopence,
I’ve neither done murder nor kill’d,
But guilty I’ve been all my lifetime,
So, gentlemen, do as you will.

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“ It’s when that I rode on the highway
I’ve always had money in great store,
And whatever I took from the rich
I freely gave it to the poor.

“ But my peace I have made with my Maker,
And with you I’m quite ready to go ;
So here’s adieu to this world and its vanities,
For I’m ready to suffer the law.”

This ballad, together with popular tradition, probably inspired Lord Macaulay to speak more kindly of Nevison than he did of the squires of whom he painted such a jaundiced, unfair, and unfaithful picture. In his *History of England*, Macaulay refers thus to Nevison :

“ It is related of William Nevison, the great robber of the north of Yorkshire, that he levied a quarterly tribute on all northern drovers, and in return, not only spared them himself, but protected them against all other thieves ; that he demanded purses in the most courteous manner ; that he gave largely to the poor what he had taken from the rich ; that his life was once spared by the royal clemency, but that he again tempted his fate and at length died, in 1685, on the gallows at York.”

Of course of Robin Hood, Dick Turpin, and “ Bold Barnaby ” it was also said that they “ robbed the rich to give to the poor.” On occasion they may have displayed philanthropy of this character, though one imagines that they would have a pretty severe and constant drain upon their income in the shape of “ hush money,” payment through the nose for hospitality for

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man and beast, and division of spoil with accomplices. With the “blood-money” previously mentioned, always there for the claiming, Nevison and his fellow “knights” had to make it more profitable to those who knew them, not to hand them over to justice. A Yorkshire writer tells us that, as is inevitable, there were those whose loyalty to “the king of highwaymen” waned as the reward for his arrest increased. Says the authority mentioned :

“At a short distance from Howley Old Ruins, overlooking Batley, I have seen many times during the last forty years a small stone let into the turf inscribed in bold letters :

Here Nevison Killed Fletcher.

“The tale goes that William Nevison was a *habitué* of an inn situated near Howley in the days of Fillycock Fair, its landlord, Darcy Fletcher, having on more than one occasion saved Nevison from being run to earth. At last, however, Darcy Fletcher and his brother turned their backs on the highwayman, and resolved to capture him in order to win a good reward which the authorities had caused to be published. When Nevison visited the inn on Saturday 20th July 1681, the brothers locked up Swift Nick, drugged their victim’s drink, and caused him to go into a profound sleep. But their plan must have been far from perfect, for Nevison was found leaving the house very early next morning before any officer had arrived to arrest him. In the violent *recontre* which took place Darcy Fletcher must have been “killed,” as says the stone, by Nevison’s pistol in self-defence. Nevison,

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in rifling his victim's pockets found the stable key, and then cut away in the direction of Morley, and, from many accounts, duly arrived beautifully disguised in York.”

On another occasion tradition says he was caught in Leicestershire and carried off to Leicester gaol, but succeeded in making his escape in a romantic manner by feigning fever and being carried out for a corpse. He made the gentlemen of the Shires pay compensation for this indignity on his way back to his native Yorkshire. Here he had a fairly long reign, thanks to the completeness of his plans and organisation. Three years before he was hanged, however, he was incarcerated at York Castle, which was thought to be impregnable, but succeeded in breaking out. We have this on the authority of the *Records of Wakefield House of Correction* (p. 41), in which it is stated that during Sir John Reresby's¹ deputyship at York, *John* Nevison “broke loose” in 1681. “*Swift Nick*” seems to have had a perfect genius for gaining his liberty, and all this would doubtless add to the romance and glamour which surrounded his name, and add to the hero-worship lavished upon him. Mr O. Heywood's *Diaries* (Vol. iv) under date Thursday, 6th March 1683-4, contain the following entry regarding his final arrest:—

“One J. Harding of Penthorp near Wakefield, understanding that *John* Nevison, the highwayman, was drinking at an alehouse near Sandal Castle, took some with him, and so apprehended Nevison, brought him to Wakefield; Mr White made him a mittimus, sent him to York in the midst of the Assize; the judge proceeded

¹ Sir John Reresby, Bart., last Governor of York. His *Memoirs* (1658-1689) were published in 1734.

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on his former conviction and condemnation of some years ago, he had his pardon, but it was conditional if he would leave the kingdom, but he had stay'd, so forfeited his life. The judge told him he must dye for he was a terrour to the country, pronounced sentence, which was executed March 15, 1683-4. He was something stupid, yet at the gallows confessed that he killed Fletcher (the constable near Hooley) in his own defence, but did not betray his companions. There was none but he executed at this Assizes. Thus at last he is found out, and taken to his mischief; his time was come though he had a long reign. He was born at Wortley betwixt Peniston and Wortley. Mtris Cotton lived in the neighbourhood, knew his parents and him when young; they were brought up prophanely, he marryed a wife at an alehouse thereabouts, hath been a notorious wretch many ways, hath committed many robbery's, had the country in such awe that the carriers paid him rent, duety, to let them alone, others let him money that he might let them passe quietly. I have seen him passe ordinarily in the road. He led his horse lately down in the street at Wakefield, was generally known, yet none were so hardy as to lay hands on him tho' there was £20 by proclamation to him that should take him, but he is at last gone, and hath left much debt at severall alehouses in the country where he haunted."

Now the famous diarist just cited knew Nevison by sight and of others who were acquainted both with his family and birthplace, so that it seems to me that his evidence—contemporary evidence—may be taken as final. It will be seen, later, however, that his nativity

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is claimed by other districts in Yorkshire. Another Yorkshire writer ¹ gives some additional details regarding Swift Nick's capture. These are rather at variance with the ballad quoted *ante*, which also was doubtless contemporary and published as a broadsheet just after the execution of the highwayman. Here is the further reference to Nevison's final undoing :

“Sandal is always allowed to be the place where William Nevison was delivered into the hands of his tormentors for the last time. There is no authority ² for quoting the Magpie Inn as the house where he was betrayed : Sandal folk in general incline to ‘The Plough,’ a rather large, old-fashioned house situated at the south corner of Castle Lane, probably where now stands the attractive modern residence of ‘Yulecroft,’ with its large garden, and, therefore, nearly opposite to the present Three Houses Inn. It must be over half a century since ‘The Plough’ was demolished, except, I think, for a small portion of its masonry converted into a cottage which was standing twenty years ago. Anyhow, I am told there used to be kept at ‘The Plough’ a well-seasoned, well-worn oak relic known as ‘Nevison's Chair,’ with arm-rests and a foot-rest. This piece of furniture was purchased by an incumbent of Sandal and placed in the sanctuary of the church, where it may be seen to-day. During the vicariate of Canon R. N. Hurt, between 1879 and 1909, Bishop Norman Straton, when Vicar of Wakefield, gave to his nephew, the Sandal vicar and wardens, for use in the sanctuary, a companion-

¹ H. Brierley.

² The Magpie is quoted in the contemporary ballad printed in full *ante*.

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chair of the same size and style, which he had had specially carved in Wakefield.

“A Royal proclamation was published for the arrest of William Nevison by any loyal officer or other subject of His Majesty, who should be entitled to receive a handsome reward on his being handed over to the Governor of York Castle. Captain William Hardcastle, then resident at Milnthorpe, about 300 yards from the Plough Inn, appears to have envisaged the highwayman and been acquainted, more or less, with his movements. He had been harboured many times by the widow at the Sign of the Plough, and Captain Hardcastle offered this lady ten guineas if she would betray him on the occasion of his next visit. On March 6, 1684, she sent to Milnthorpe the metaphoric message under cover. ‘Sir,—The Bird is in the cage.’ Captain William Hardcastle, the Constable of Sandal, and John Ramsden, armed with a warrant of arrest, pistols, and cordage, proceeded to the ‘Plough’ about midnight, and found their tired victim locked up in his chamber asleep. Having overawed him, and pinioned his bare arms, Nevison was conveyed to his old quarters at York, and fettered with irons. After a trial and conviction he was hanged at the tyburn on Knavesmire, beside the Tadcaster Road, on May 4, 1684¹ (reign of King James II.), being then probably forty-four years old.

“Tradition speaks of a Cock-and-Bottle, or ‘Coq-en-le-Bataille,’ Inn at Sandal. At the south corner of Castle Lane used to stand the ‘Magpie,’ which was turned into

¹ Heywood gives March 15 as the date of execution; most other authorities say May 4. The former is correct.

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three cottages after being deprived of its licence, and when I was on a visit to Sandal, in 1903, I found one of these ‘Magpie’ cottages inhabited by the church sexton. The Plough, Magpie, and Cross Keys appear to have been lumped together at the junction of Castle Lane, all clamouring for custom and trying to outrival each other. When the ‘Plough’ and the ‘Magpie’ were reduced to cottage dwellings, their licences were transferred to the ‘Cross Keys,’ and this triple business connection is to-day seen in the unusual appellation of ‘Three Houses’ on the sign of the former ‘Cross Keys.’ The ‘Three Houses’ has an old-fashioned and picturesque appearance, its stuccoed walls adorned with climbing roses, and two big, red-blinded bay-windows which suggest comfortable, quaintly-furnished parlours in keeping with the whole structure.”

There is at Upsal, near Thirsk, a Nevison House, at which it is claimed locally that the famous highwayman was born. On one of the gables are the initials I. (or J.) N. wrought in iron, whilst at the other are (or were) two pieces of curved metal which, so says tradition, were the shoes he reversed on one of his horses to mislead his pursuers in a snowstorm. Unfortunately for the claim, though a family of the same name *did* at one time reside there, the first entries in the parish register are dated 1711, when a daughter of “Will Nevesson” was baptised, and 1720, when “Mr Wm. Nevinson” departed from this naughty and wicked world. So it may be taken as certain that “Swift Nick” never occupied the secret chamber in the cellar of Nevison House, which is credited with having been one of his hiding-places. The claim of Pontefract to having been the birthplace of Nevison is equally unsupported.

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Another tradition says that Nevison in his early days made his way to Flanders and enlisted there as a soldier, serving under the Duke of York, who about this time was made Lieut.-General of the Spanish forces under Don Juan of Austria. Nevison, it is said, was at the siege of Dunkirk, where he displayed conspicuous bravery. It was after all this that he “took to the road,” carrying out his exploits single-handed, but having a trusted friend in one Adam Hawksworth, who had an inn at Ringston Hill near Wakefield. Eventually Adam lost his license and had to take down his sign and pay a heavy fine in 1676 for harbouring “lewd fellows who infest the road.” An ancient oak near the inn is said to have been the place of concealment of such valuables as “Nick” could not immediately dispose.

Whether it was he or Turpin who performed the London to York ride is another matter of uncertainty and confused conjecture. Many decline to believe that either of them did it, and that the whole story is pure fiction. The possibility is examined in connection with Turpin to whose name the feat is popularly attached. We know from local legend, which invariably had some foundation in fact, that Nevison was a bold, fearless horseman. “Nevison’s leap,” a mile or so beyond Ferrybridge, will remain for all time as a memorial to this. On one of the many occasions when he had to flee for safety, he led his mounted followers a merry dance across country to the edge of a ravine which his horse jumped leaving the officers of the law “cold.”

It is said that the horse which took this “lep” was a one-eyed, brown, three-parts bred animal, which would

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follow him anywhere and could single him out in a crowd like a dog. “Of course,” said a very old man to me years ago, when discussing Nevison’s horse-craft, “he knew the secret of how to get a horse to follow its owner.” Probably the secret is that divulged by Fairfax in *The Compleat Sportsman*, as follows :—

“ . . . To make a horse follow his master, and to find him out and challenge him amongst ever so many people. Take a pound of oatmeal, to which put a quarter of a pound of honey, and half a pound of liquourice, make a little cake thereof, and put into your bosom next to your naked skin, then run and labour yourself till you sweat, and so rub all your sweat upon your cake ; then keep the horse fasting a day and a night and give it him to eat, which done, turn him loose, and he shall not only follow you, but also hunt and seek you out when he has lost you ; and when he comes to you spit in his mouth, annoint his tongue with your spittle, and thus doing he shall never forsake you.”

Born in 1639 Nevison, as shown, came to his end in 1684, so there was no more “Bloody News from Yorkshire” as the old pamphlet has it, so far as he was concerned. They took three days to convey Nick from Sandal to York according to the records of Wakefield Sessions, though, the bad state of the roads thenadays notwithstanding, one is inclined to imagine this included the return journey. Anyhow the entry runs :

“9th Oct. 1684 : Order for Constable of Sandal to pay John Ramsden 10s. 6d. for the Constable of Sandal and Will. Hardcastle, gentleman, three days conveying one Nevison, a highwayman, to the Castle of York, and 2s. 6d. for obtaining the order.”

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There were broadsheets galore when once “Swift Nick” was hanging on the gibbet on Knavesmire, and retribution was no longer feared. One, published shortly after his execution, erroneously states he was “born at Pomfret in Yorkshire about 1639,” and sets forth on its title-page, the contents thus :

The
Yorkshire Rogue
or
Capt. Hind Improv’d;
in

The Notorious Life and infamous Death of that Famous Highwayman, William Nevison, who was executed at York, the 15th day of March 1684.

Together

with a short account of several great Robberies committed by Edward Bracy, his comrade, another Notorious Highwayman in Nottinghamshire, who, as the country came to apprehend him, was shot to death. LONDON: Printed by T. Moore & Ashburn for R. Boldwin in the Old Bailey, 1684.





xv. *The Story of Dick Turpin*

Turpin had his Black Bess, and she carried him well,
As Fame with her loud-breathing trumpet will tell ;
She knew not the lash, and she suffered no spur ;
A bold rider was all that was needed by her.
That rider grew pallid and cautious with fear,
There was danger around him and death in his rear ;
But he mocked at the legion of foes on his track,
When he found himself firm on his bonnie steed's back.

Eliza Cook.

The attitude towards highwaymen — or rather those of them who were long on the road and the heroes of a hundred exploits—was, in the stage-coach days, something of a paradox. The “ Road Inspectors ” (as highwaymen were called) were at one and the same time admired and feared ; subjected to hero-worship and calumny, sheltered, protected, and “ given away ” when the reward became too tempting. In an age when the dangers and adventures of the road were one of the main topics of conversation in castle and cot, hall and hostel, folk feared to journey alone, and made their wills and said their prayers before setting out by coach, or as one of a party travelling together for greater safety. The movements, deeds, daring, captures, and gibbeting of highwaymen, then—days appealed to the imaginations of a somewhat local-

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mindful people. Possibly as the incidents, accidents, and thrills of the road percolated orally from district to district they became considerably embroidered. Imagination filled in picturesque details and made heroes or villains according to the caprice of the narrators, or the generally accepted conception of individual knights of the road. Nevertheless, the accounts we have preserved to us of the conduct of these masked and mounted gentry—and many of them *were* gentlemen born—together with the story of their career, misdeeds—albeit kindly deeds too—would serve to show that though oft-told tales became distorted, there was really no need to conjure up the imagination when highwaymen and their practice of their profession was under discussion. Possibly those who lived in the days when highwaymen rode on the main coach roads were apt to be a little too credulous; possibly, too, later generations have gone to the other extreme of *incredulity*. Now it is a well-established and well-tested fact that rural tradition handed down from father to son has sufficient foundation to justify it being treated with respect. Such is the case with the once popular hero of the road—Dick Turpin. Fortunately one can produce sufficient evidence to show that much that is picturesque in connection with the life and exploits of the immortal Richard are not mere chimera and imagination; I say fortunately, inasmuch as it once more establishes the truth that legend is not necessarily mere myth and that folk-tales are not old wives' tales and fancies.

The true story of Richard Turpin has never to my knowledge been told. One generation spoiled him

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with hero-worship, called him "a gallant gentleman," believed that Robin Hood-like he took from the rich to give to the poor (an eighteenth-century rabid socialism, forsooth!)—then hung him. The next generation made even a greater hero of him, whilst that which succeeded it said: "There never was such a person, or, if there was, Black Bess and the ride from London to York is all pure fiction emanating from the fertile brain of Harrison Ainsworth."

Miss Violet Wilson, the authoress of *The Coaching Era* (after admitting that Turpin returned a mourning ring with the remark that highwaymen were "too much gentlemen to take anything a gentleman valued so much"), drags the heart out of the tradition, throws discredit on the picturesque, and robs history of Black Bess and legend of the ride to York. Thus Miss Wilson:

"Many stories, true and fictitious, have collected round the personalities of the most noted highwaymen, but probably the one which appeals most to the popular imagination is the account of Dick Turpin's fictitious ride to York, which originated in the inventive genius of Harrison Ainsworth. In real life Dick Turpin was a brutal and, it is hinted, cowardly ruffian, who never rode to York in one day or owned the celebrated but mythical Black Bess."

Now let us analyse these condemnatory statements and denials of the truth of tradition, in the light of facts which I have been at some pains to collect at odd times and in divers places during the last quarter of a century. Personally, I am inclined to think they serve to substantiate traditions. Let us start at the beginning.

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Richard Turpin was born at Hempstead, a little village in Essex, not at Thaxted (or Thackstead) as erroneously stated in the bills authorising his arrest which were broadcasted all over England in 1737. Born in 1705, Turpin was only thirty-two when he found his name figuring with that of other notorious highwaymen amongst the collection of proclamations and offers of reward for apprehension, posted on the walls of roadside buildings, smithy doors, and hung in every hostelry. "Dick" first saw the light in the Crown Inn (? erstwhile the Bell) at Hempstead, and was carried from thence to the village church to be baptised on 21st September 1705. The record of this first public appearance of one whose name was later to ring throughout the land, states that he was the son of John and Mary Turpin. In view of the natal date mentioned, it will be seen later that the highwayman's age (given as twenty-eight) was incorrect on his coffin after he had been hanged at York on 7th April 1739, and buried in St George's Churchyard, Fishergate, within the city walls, a parish which contained an extra parochial area. St George's Church was demolished years ago and the parish attached to St Denys.

At the outset of his career the embryo knight of the road was apprenticed to a butcher in Whitechapel (his father had been butcher as well as innkeeper), and tradition has it that he was a dare-devil lad and the leading spirit in all the scrapes and disturbances to which butcher boys in those days seem to have been particularly prone. However, he finished his apprenticeship, for he set up for himself as a butcher in Essex, which he would probably not have been allowed to do had he not completed his period of

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novitiate. The Butcher's Guilds very jealously guarded their rights in this direction.

From his early days—and this brings us to about 1726, when Turpin was of age—a spirit of adventure appears to have obsessed him more than that of the law of meum and tuum. He married a Miss Palmer, and there were unsavoury rumours as to whence came some of the carcasses which hung in Richard's shop. Sheep were missed, and though Turpin was rarely known to buy any one could always supply his customers with prime mutton. It was difficult in those days, however, to prove the suspicions which were pretty generally felt, insomuch as butchers had then no auction markets and had to "seek up" their cattle, often from far afield. Eventually there was pretty conclusive evidence that two beasts, known to be in Turpin's slaughter-house, were those a farmer named Giles of Plaistow had sold at Waltham Abbey, and which had mysteriously disappeared. Turpin dare not stay to face the music and fled from justice.

Judging from the evidence given at the trial which ended in his undoing—it was years after the event with which we are at present dealing—and his subsequent mode of life—cattle-pilfering never quite satisfied his adventurous and romantic temperament. There is not a bit of doubt about it that Richard Turpin loved the limelight. Possibly—not to say probably—his whole life and outlook was influenced by the stories he had heard from his youth up of Nevison—"Swift Nick" as the King Charles II. named him—the famous Yorkshire highwayman dealt with in the preceding chapter. In every alehouse throughout the land—and Turpin

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seems from his early days to have had a *penchant* for the good fellowship he found in taverns—was the old ballad, quoted in full at p. 217, sung :

“Did you ever hear tell of that hero,
Bold Nevison, that was his name ?
He rode about like a hero,
And with that he gained great fame.

“He maintained himself like a gentleman,
Besides he was good to the poor,
He rode about like a bold hero,
And he gained himself favour therefore.”

After analysing Turpin's psychology one does not wonder that the spirit of the ballad had a potent influence upon him. Well ! what Nevison was to his generation and epoch Turpin was to his—only more so. That possibly was his ambition. Maybe he took Yorkshire's “Swift Nick” as his ideal, hero, and model, and emulated his feats. This, too, may in some measure account for the fact that the twain have been much confused by successive historians despite the obvious anachronism.

It is said that after leaving his wife to carry on the butchery business as best she might—they parted good friends, for we find her assisting him later when he was in hiding—he threw in his lot with a band of smugglers near Harwich. Tired of the smell of the sea and the inglorious work of trafficking in illicit cargoes, he next turned Robin Hood and lived a life under the greenwood tree in Epping Forest. Here he became identified with a daring band of deer poachers and cattle thieves to whom

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his knowledge of skinning and dressing was of much assistance. Amongst his *confrères* here were Gregory, Fielder, Rose, and Wheeler, against the first three of whom Wheeler eventually turned King's evidence, with the result that they were hanged at Tyburn. Perhaps when they were all in the net together they saw that the game was up and drew lots as to which should save his neck by incriminating the others. Prior to this, however, it was discovered that stealing purses, not only offered much greater fun to the outlaws, but also that it was more worth the candle, and that there was less danger of the booty being traced than was the case with horses and cattle. So the new Robin Hood and his merry men—much more desperadoes and much less picturesque than those of Sherwood Forest—changed their tactics and rounded up travellers instead of cattle. A good haul enabled them to lay quiet for a time when the hue and cry was at its height.

Once having embarked upon robbery from persons, Turpin and his fellows appear to have lost all scruple and degenerated into common housebreakers. They visited a farmer at Rippleside and so terrorised him that he disclosed the hiding-place of some seven hundred guineas he had stored away at home rather than trust them to the then suspected banks. On the 10th of January 1735 Dick and his companions in crime met at the George Inn, Woolwich, and there made their plans for another haul. Mr Charlton, who lived in Kent, was this time the victim, and the following night the robbery was carried into effect. A week later Mr Sheldon of Croydon received an unwelcome visit, and had to

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“part” at the pistol point; and the next month they ransacked the house of Mr Lawrance in Edgware.

Probably up to this time Turpin had no title to hero-worship. He was consorting with a violent, relentless, even cruel crew, who do not seem to have had a redeeming feature—certainly no claim upon sentimental memories. The best that can be said for Turpin is that he was not with them when they murdered and perpetrated acts of violence which are entirely foreign to his traditional history—though, of course, when it was a question of capture or safety with Dick he did not scruple to use his pistol as well as his brains. There is this, too, to be said for his fellow-bandits: when their name rang throughout the land as a gang of merciless blackguards, and the King offered a free pardon and a reward of fifty guineas to any of the much-hunted culprits who would give information leading to the conviction of the remainder, there was not a Judas found amongst them till Wheeler saved his neck under circumstances already detailed. In the Royal proclamation mentioned Turpin is rather stripped of the *distingué* appearance attributed to him by later-day impersonators on the stage and picture-screen. The official description is as follows:—

“About thirty-five, five feet nine inches high, brown complexion, very much marked with smallpox, his cheek bones broad, his face thinner towards the bottom, his visage short and pretty upright, and broad about the shoulders.”

The reward for the capture of Turpin was increased in 1737, which seems to have been the year of his greatest activity on the road. *The London Magazine* of that date

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contains frequent references to "this fellow who hath struck terror all over the country," as, indeed, did the contemporary Press generally. The following quotations from the journal specified are worth citing :—

"Sunday, May 22, 1737—Turpin, the butcher, who lately killed a man who endeavoured to take him on Epping Forest, this night robbed several gentlemen in their coaches and chaises at Holloway and the back lanes at Islington, and took from them several sums of money. One of the gentlemen signified to him that he had reigned a long time. Turpin replied : ' 'Tis no matter for that. I am not afraid of being taken by you, therefore don't stand hesitating but give me the coin.' "

"Friday, July 24, 1737—His Majesty the King was pleased to promise his most gracious pardon to any of Turpin's accomplices who shall discover him so that he may be apprehended and convicted of the murder or any of the robberies he has committed, as likewise a reward of £200 to any person or persons who shall discover the said criminal so that he may be apprehended and convicted as aforesaid, over and above all other rewards to which they may be entitled."

"August, 1737—COMMON-SENSE THOUGHTS. That a fellow who is known to be a thief by the whole kingdom shall for a long time continue to rob us, and not only so, to make jest of us for being robbed, and shall defy the law and laugh at justice. That the whole nation shall see this and sit quiet and contented and shall trust to the common methods of taking rogues by officers who are perhaps afraid of him, and which is not impossible, perhaps bribed by him, only in hopes that we ourselves

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escape what several of our countrymen have and must suffer. As this man is therefore a public evil, to put an end to success is become the duty of public spirit, and I cannot help hoping that some amongst us possessed of this noble principle, will unite together to destroy him, which, if once attempted, must be mighty easy to execute; and this fellow who hath struck a terror all over the kingdom will soon be brought to the fate he deserves, and be rather an unfortunate example than an encouragement to all succeeding villains."

Turpin, with his daring and faculty for leading men, had become the recognised head of the band of ruffians with whom he had allied himself. It is possible, not to say probable, that some of their most revolting deeds were laid to his charge. Although they must all have felt that the gallows was sooner or later inevitable, as already pointed out, not one of them seized the opportunity of expiating his crimes at the cost of the degradation of turning informer. To the reward offered by the King the Duke of Newcastle added a hundred guineas for the capture of any of the gang. This followed upon the murder of Mason, the keeper of Epping Forest, in which, however, Turpin had no part. As a matter of fact, he was in the cups in London at the time. The reward, together with public indignation, resulted in some of the feared band being traced to a small yard in Westminster. Turpin was amongst them, but though the others were captured he managed to make his escape by jumping out of a window. Then was it Wheeler "gave his companions away," and then was it Dick Turpin changed his mode of life.

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He lay concealed for some time—tradition says he lived in a hut between King's Oak Road and Loughton Road, and was supplied with food by his wife. Another hiding-place was Turpin's Cave at a small inn near High Beech, Epping Forest, from whence he went to Bungay in Suffolk for a time, and then removed to the outskirts of London where he "took to the road." It is believed that just before he had adopted this new *rôle* he fatally shot one of the staff of Thompson (the successor to the murdered Mason of Epping Forest), who attempted to arrest him near Loughton. Once more he had to flee, and was next heard of in Hertfordshire; there he had one or two hair-breadth escapes. Prior to this he had gained the admiration of Tom King, another highwayman, whom he had once endeavoured to "hold up" on the road, and with whom he had "worked" in Cambridge-shire. King now took him under his protecting wing and introduced him to a number of innkeepers, who not only readily gave hospitality to "gentlemen of the road," but were in consort with them. King and Dick again seem to have joined forces, and with them was another lesser-known highwayman named Potter. But Turpin was without a horse, and probably recognising that on the swiftness of his mount might one day depend his safety, he set covetous eyes upon Whitestockings, a race-horse owned by Mr Major—a grey colt by the famous Partner, foaled in 1736. Eventually he borrowed it one Saturday evening and by Monday morning it was traced to the stables at the Red Lion in Whitechapel, whither King had ridden it. The constables hoped not only to recover the horse but also to secure Turpin and

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his accomplice—particularly the former. They waited the time when one or the other would go to the stable, and, as luck would have it, King was the first so to do. One of the officers of the law, a man named Boyes, was concealed in the hay-loft above, and as King was saddling his own horse, he quietly descended the ladder, and was in the act of seizing King when Turpin also entered the stable, and taking in the situation at a glance, whipped out that bright pistol with brass gargoyle embossed butt—which struck terror into the hearts of many a traveller and the passengers of many a coach—and fired at Boyes. To his everlasting regret the bullet meant for the constable found a target in King.

“I’m winged, Dick!” said King. . . . “You go before the others come. Take my mare; she’s saddled, and there’s not a horse between here and York can catch her. I’ll meet you again at the old place this day fortnight. See if I don’t.”

Turpin hesitated. It was not in the nature of the man to desert a comrade in distress. But King implored him to go, saying: “It’s *you* they’re really after and the gallows will get you if you stop. Against me they can prove nothing; be off before it’s too late.”

Turpin saw that his wounded friend had Boyes covered with his pistol and eventually consented to leave him, believing that whereas King could wriggle out of the hands of the law there would be no chance for him if he was caught. So, regretfully, Turpin rode off on King’s mare—some say she was the Black Bess of poetry and tradition. The wounded man only lived a week, and not hearing of his death for some time, Turpin remained

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in the vicinity of Epping Forest (possibly in the bricked-in Turpin's Cave already mentioned) awaiting the promised meeting. Discovered by the keepers, hunted and harassed, Turpin at last learnt that King could never more join him in this world, so determined to leave the South entirely and straightway rode off for Lincolnshire, a county which, like Yorkshire, appealed strongly both to horse lovers and horse thieves—and Richard Turpin was both! He stayed here and there in Lincolnshire, till at last he settled at Sutton, near Alford, assuming his wife's maiden name of Palmer.

It was probably just prior to this that Turpin performed his ride to York, if there is any foundation for the story at all. Macaulay (who himself mixes up Nevison and Turpin) points out that the same feat has been ascribed to several other highwaymen of note, and then goes on to credit Nevison with having ridden from London to York between sunrise and sunset after committing a robbery in the South. The *raison d'être* was to establish an alibi, and Macaulay chronicles that to make this more complete Nevison engaged in a game of bowls with the Lord Mayor of York at Naburn shortly after his arrival. Now it is a recorded fact that Nevison *did* satisfy the judge and jury with the plea of an alibi and that he *did* ride from London to York *circa* 1676 (he was hung for another offence eight years later). The historians are probably confused and inaccurate in claiming that the incident of the game of bowls with my Lord Mayor and the ride from the Metropolis to York on that occasion was performed by the immortal Richard on Black Bess. Eliza

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Cook is amongst those who duplicate the ride. She says in her Turpin and Black Bess panegyric :

“ She kept up her career for many a league,
With no slackening of pace and no sign of fatigue.”

Some chroniclers state that the famous mare was stolen from Lincolnshire, whither, as I have already said, Turpin eventually settled down as “ John Palmer, Esquire.”

To deny or discountenance the traditional ride from London to York on no better grounds than incredulity—that the feat is a physical impossibility—of course betrays ignorance of achievements in the saddle. It may have been—it probably *was*—the case, that the highwayman had relays of horses along the Great North Road to cope with such eventualities as pursuit, lameness, a horse being shot or wounded under him. It may have been that he rode two or three horses on his traditional alibi-day and completed the final stage of the journey on the immortal Black Bess. There is nothing unprecedented in the man himself riding two hundred miles in a day, however remarkable the performance for a horse. When I recall, in this connection, fifteen or sixteen years ago I regularly rode some twenty miles to meet hounds, hunted all day and rode home (often twenty to twenty-five miles) at night on the same horse and it by no means “ beat,” I am far less inclined to doubt that Black Bess *did* perform the feat attributed to her. She would be “ baited ” at wayside inns (which is impossible when out hunting, though one may call at some hostelry for a bucket of warm water and beer, with a handful of oatmeal in it, on the homeward journey after a long day). It is recorded, too,

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in *Fuller's Worthies*, that a certain Yorkshire esquire to James I., named John Lepton, undertook to ride between London and York on six consecutive days, and began his task on 20th May 1606, accomplishing his journey every day before darkness. Then, too, we have the two hundred miles' feat of another Yorkshire squire—Osbaldeston to wit—performed in much less time than that of the Dick Turpin and Black Bess legend. In recent times Mr Tyrwhitt Drake has shown us on an Arab that the journey on horseback is by no means an impossibility, and, too, in an age when the roadsides no longer have on each side wide parallel borders of grass for the benefit of horsemen. Undoubtedly it would be much more possible to "go the pace" when these horse-tracks existed, whereas only by isolated stretches of the Great North Road would it now be possible to canter. Incidentally, too, those who know anything at all about horses also know the saving to their legs and from fatigue which results from grass tracks as opposed to the highway. Are we not told "it's not the 'unting 'urts the 'osses, but the 'ammer, 'ammer, 'ammer on the 'ard 'igh road?" So, on the score of physical impossibility, we may dismiss objections to the Nevison or Turpin ride.

And now to revert to Richard Turpin, *alias* "John Palmer, Esquire," now a gentleman horse-dealer in Lincolnshire. He seemed a respectable enough chap, an excellent rider, till he again resorted to sheep-stealing and was arrested by the village constable, but succeeded in breaking away from him and crossed the Humber. He stayed for a while at Brough, then went to North Cave, and eventually settled down at Welton, near Beverley,

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where he hunted "borrowed" horses from Lincolnshire to ride and sell in Yorkshire, and was rather lionised by sportsmen in the Holderness country of the East Riding. They asked him to their houses, he joined their shooting-parties, and by his prowess in the field became a great favourite.

Then this ex-butcher, ex-murderer, brought about his undoing by a piece of trivial insensate folly, probably resulting from swelled head. He had been out with a party of Yorkshire gentlemen and had shot rather badly. Coming back one of them twitted him and said he "couldn't hit a barn-yard fowl." Piqued at this, Turpin raised his gun and shot a gamecock belonging to his landlord, which was out "at walk" with a sporting cottager whose place they were passing. Mr Hall, grandfather of the famous master of the Holderness Hounds of that name, remonstrated with Turpin—or rather "Mr John Palmer" as he was known—whereupon the highwayman, forgetting his pseudo-rôle, angrily threatened to shoot Mr Hall too, "if he remained within range by the time he reloaded his gun." The result of the threat was that an application was made to Mr Crowle, a local magistrate, for a summons against "Mr Palmer," who in due course appeared at Beverley Petty Sessions before Mr Bethell and Sir Marmaduke Constable, and was ordered to find bail and sureties. To the surprise of all those with whom he had been so popular in the district—who had admired his horsemanship in the hunting-field, enjoyed his wit over their wine, and courted his company—"Mr Palmer" could not produce a single friend to act as sponsor for him. . . .

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Then were suspicions aroused. Who was this Mr Palmer?—an adventurer?—or worse? The Beverley bench thought it wise to keep him under lock and key, and to make some inquiries as to his antecedents. He was eventually compelled to admit that he had lived at Long Sutton in Lincolnshire, and on dispatching a constable thither it was discovered a score of persons were anxious to know of the whereabouts of “Mr Palmer” to recover unpaid debts and for other matters more serious. Yet, when they had him by the heels, they would not prosecute even before they knew that “Mr Palmer” concealed the identity of Richard Turpin. “No,” they said, “he was a good fellow, he spent his money freely when he was amongst us, and was a good friend to everyone, even though he took from Peter to pay Paul.”

It transpired that one whom he had robbed came to him and told him that he had lost what meant to him practically ruination, and asked Dick if he could help him in any way. Now, despite his deeds of violence—committed when it was a matter of life or death with him—Turpin had a heart, and so soon as he heard this tale of woe he asked of how much his visitor had been robbed—a pretty bit of chicanery. “Nearly two hundred guineas,” was the reply, “and I am very near certain it was that scoundrel Dick Turpin who took it from me. . . . May the gallows soon get him !”

“By all accounts,” retorted “Mr Palmer,” “this Turpin is not so bad a fellow after all ; here’s two hundred guineas and another fifty to help you as you say you’re in a tight corner. . . . And don’t think too hard of Dick, or be too glad when the day comes that he’s caught and strung up.”

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On 16th October 1738, Turpin actually *was* caught, and on 22nd March 1739 was committed—still as “John Palmer”—to take his trial at York Assizes for stealing a mare and foal, the property of Thomas Creasey, from Hacklington Common, near Welton. This time there was no chance of escape. He was escorted to York by John Milner and George Smith, two of the most burly constables in the East Riding. Moreover, they took the precaution of handcuffing their prisoner to themselves and having him in chains before they mounted the coach which was to take them to York. For four months he remained in durance vile in York Castle where his early hero, Nevison, had been before him. Indeed, at the end of that period he was to occupy the very same cell in which “Swift Nick” had awaited his doom.

Trusting to his misdeeds as Richard Turpin, “the terror of the road,” not coming to light, the prisoner still hoped to escape the rigour of the law. He saw quite plainly, however, that it was essential he should have some testimony as to his early days, so wrote to his brother at Thackstead, Essex, asking him to arrange for someone to come and identify him as “John Palmer” and “give him a character” at his trial. Failing this he urged his kinsman to “cook” him a character in writing which he could produce to hoodwink the judge. As luck would have it he was hoist by his own petard. Had it not been for that letter the probability is that his own wit might have secured his release, or that as “John Palmer” he would have gone to the gallows. When his letter arrived at Thackstead there was sixpence to pay, and not recognising the writing, his brother declined to accept the package

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which, in consequence, went back to the village post-office. Here, however, the caligraphy *was* recognised; for Smith, the old postmaster, had been Turpin's school-master nearly thirty years before. Now, like everyone else throughout the whole county of Essex—nay, the whole of England—Smith knew that there had long been a price on Turpin's head. Probably he opened the letter bearing the York postmark. Anyhow, old man though he was, he set out on the long journey to York and there identified "John Palmer" as his erstwhile pupil and the renowned highwayman, Richard Turpin. No doubt he got his reward, no doubt Turpin deserved his, nevertheless one somehow resents the Judas in his old dominie. It is antagonistic to the English character to accept blood-money, and one imagines there would be a smile of contempt upon the face of the unmasked "John Palmer" when the old man from Thackstead post-office tottered into the box. Apart from his identification there was abundant evidence to convict. Witnesses were brought from Hempstead—simple village folk who had known Turpin all their lives. Probably, unlike old traitor Smith, they did not go voluntarily to York. Those who have their finger upon the pulse of the temper of village life know the fear there is ingrained of "the law." One imagines these witnesses who helped to fasten the noose round Turpin's neck, were marshalled pretty much like a squad of recruits on a barrack-square and drilled as to what they had to say. Be this as it may, they certainly do not seem to have had a good word for the prisoner amongst them, and Turpin complained to the judge of the unfairness of his trial. So to death this gay, often gallant,

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in later life picturesque and even romantic, character was condemned. As one would expect he died no craven coward, but to the end maintained his reputation as a gay and fearless—*mourir tout en vie* !

The Records of York Castle give his ignominious death as having taken place on Saturday, 7th April 1739 (not 17th as stated by most chroniclers), and it is also there preserved for the benefit of future generations how he calmly faced his end, and how he personally arranged the details of his obsequies with just a touch of vanity and evidence of his affection for display and parade. Here is the reference in the Records referred to :

“The notorious Turpin appeared in a brand-new fustian frock and new pumps for his execution ; he even hired five poor men, at ten shillings each, to walk as mourners behind the cart which carried him to Tyburn. All the way he bowed to the numerous spectators repeatedly, and with the most astonishing indifference and intrepidity. As he ascended the ladder, because one of his legs trembled he stamped it down with an air of assumed courage, as though he were afraid of discovering any signs of fear. Having conversed with the executioner about half an hour, he threw himself off the ladder and expired in a few minutes. After execution the corpse was taken by the “mourners” to the Blue Boar in Castlegate ; there they buried it in the churchyard of St George’s parish. Some enterprising surgeons dug him up, but the populace, ascertaining where he had been taken, fetched him out of a garden at the back of Stonegate, and carried the body in a sort of procession through the streets, eventually replacing it in the grave.”

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On the morning of his execution Turpin arranged for the purchase of the silken streaming hat-bands worn by the mourners on that day, and black kid gloves for several others who were to follow his remains. A gold ring and his shoes he desired to be given to a married woman at Brough, in the East Riding. All this was duly carried out even to a plate upon his coffin bearing his initials and erroneously stating his age to be twenty-eight.

The manacles he wore whilst confined in York Castle, and the iron girdle which encircled his body, with two clasps for the wrists, are in the possession of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society, and may now be seen in the Museum at York. It is opined that as like as not the heavy irons were also worn by Nevison. Incidentally, too, the bag in which the immortal Dick carried his food and spoils is in the same repository.

It is passing strange that if the ride from London to York was actually undertaken by Turpin as well as Nevison, no reference is made to it in the pamphlet published after the highwayman's execution. This sets forth Turpin's career as follows:—

The Trial of the Notorious Highwayman, Richard Turpin

At York Assizes, on the 22nd Day of March 1739, before the Hon. Sir William Chapple, Knt., Judge of Assizes, and one of His Majesty's Justices of the Court of King's Bench.

Taken down in Court by Mr Thomas Kyll, Professor of Shorthand, to which is prefix'd an exact account of the said Turpin, from his first coming into Yorkshire to the

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Time of his being committed Prisoner to the York Castle ; communicated by Mr Appleton of Beverley, Clerk of the Peace for the East Riding of the said county.

With a copy of a letter which Turpin received from his father, while under sentence of Death. To which is added :

His behaviour at the Place of Execution, on Saturday the 7th of April 1739. Together with the whole confession he made to the hangman at the gallows ; wherein he acknowledged himself guilty of the Facts for which he suffered, own'd the Murder of Mr Thompson's Servant on Epping Forest, and gave a particular Account of several Robberies which he had committed.

The Fourth Edition

To which is prefix'd a large and genuine History of the Life of Turpin, from his birth to his death ; and all his Transactions and Robberies, and the various Methods he took to conceal himself. The whole ground on well-attested Facts, and communicated by Richard Boyes, at the Green Man on Epping Forest, and other persons of the county of Essex.

York :

Printed by Ward & Chandler, booksellers, at their Printing Office in Coney-Street ; and sold at their shop without Temple-Bar, London ; 1739. (Price Sixpence.)

It would require a whole volume to place on record all the stories one heard in childhood's days along the Great North Road regarding the exploits of Turpin. Many of these gave us an insight into another side to his

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character—the kindly, generous, an' you will, knightly traits he possessed, as well as his daring and feats of horsemanship which so strongly appealed to the northerner. Latterly, at any rate, he raised the cut-throat “stand and deliver” business to a higher level. Thus was it that in his day of fame on the road folk said if they were to be robbed at all they would prefer it to be by Turpin, “for he was sure to do it courteously, and, if they had ladies with them, to use every care not to alarm them more than he could help.” His dress, his bearing, his general appearance in the saddle, a certain refinement and dignity, all these helped—so one gathers from tradition—to surround Turpin with an air of romance and picturesqueness. It didn't save him from the gallows in the end, and probably there was a general sense of relief when it was known he had expiated his crimes. But even this relief would probably be tempered with a certain sentimental regret. When chivalry is met with in those whose lives are steeped in villainy it stands out the more conspicuously. There is no doubt about Turpin's villainy ; there seems to have been no doubt also about his chivalry. Mr R. A. H. Goodyear, a Yorkshire poet, in the last verses written on Turpin refers to his possession of this attribute :

You would look down your nose, Richard Turpin,
If you rode the York Road of to-day ;
They'd laugh at your dare-devil pose, Dick,
As their horns scared your Black Bess away.
No purses of gold would you take, Dick—
By paper we pay what we owe ;

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Your chivalrous heartstrings would break, Dick,
At the poor modern taxpayer's woe.
You'd wish yourself back, Richard Turpin,
In the days of King Charles and Nell Gwynn,
When coaches held wealth to ransack, Dick,
And tax-forms were not to fill in.

It seems appropriate to conclude with the following paragraph which appeared in a Yorkshire newspaper on July 1923:—

“The graveyard of St George's Church, York, in which Dick Turpin is buried, is being converted into a rest garden. No stone marks the grave of the famous highwayman, and it is the intention of the rector to put up a small memorial tablet.”





xvi. *Pennock's Curse*



In view of the weight of evidence contained in many local traditions, and even admitting that much of it may justly be discredited, one is apt to wonder if some of the old professional seers—the wisemen and witches—did not really possess some forensic power. My late father, who spent much time, extending over many years, in collecting legendary lore, folk-tales, and superstitions, was emphatically of the opinion that many of the crystal-gazers and necromancers were not mere opportunists trading on the credulity of those who lived in what was admittedly a dark, ignorant, and superstitious age. He found something more than chicanery and legerdemain in the practice of their art ; and more than rodomontade in their claims to be gifted with occult power and second sight.

One of the folk-stories which he considered most convincing in the attitude he took, was that known as “Pennock's Curse”—a dramatic story, pregnant with interest and incident—which deals with the first decade of the nineteenth century. At this period there was living at Scorton, near Richmond, Yorkshire, one Sally Kildredth, a deformed old woman, who was counted for miles around as a witch. At her birth Sally was found

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to possess, not only a curious birthmark, but also a double caul. Even as a girl she was considered to be uncanny, and in the light of after events, the peculiarities mentioned were recalled as incontrovertible evidence that she had been marked and set aside to look into the future and work mysteries in the present. It must be remembered that in her epoch rural folks made a study of birthmarks and—especially to those who went down to the sea in ships—cauls had a wealth of lore surrounding them and a certain financial value too.

Sally Kildredth, bent, wrinkled, and deformed as she became in her late years, was not born a cripple, but became such through the snapping of a weaver's beam. This did not, however, save her from the rough usage which seems to have been pretty generally meted out to those whose charms vanished with increasing years, and who—possibly in the senile evening of their lives—were suspected of employing the black arts to cast spells upon those whom they disliked, or were paid to hurt, either in person or through their possessions. From all the data my late father collected it would seem that Sally was not ducked in Scorton's now disappearing goose-pond without some cause. So many of her foretellings came true, so mysterious was much of her conduct, that she came not only to be feared but to have the ill-will of almost everyone in the neighbourhood. Eventually, so frequently was she threatened and maltreated that she left her native village and went to Lancashire to end her days with a married daughter. It is recalled that her final prophecy before her departure was that concerning one George Pennock. . . . And now for the story.

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One lovely summer afternoon a stranger on horseback, riding towards Catterick, met a crowd of young and old of both sexes dragging old Sally along, intent upon ducking her in the Swale. George Pennock, the ring-leader, would have been a handsome fellow had not the passions of an evil life, left their lines imprinted deep upon his face. In reply to a question from the horseman, Pennock told him "to go his way, and not interfere with what they were after." Sally, however, begged so hard of the stranger to intercede upon her behalf, that the young fellow called upon the crowd to halt.

"Now," said he, "if you'll promise to let the old lady go I'll fight the best man amongst you, and there'll be more fun in that than in ducking an old dame like that, with one foot already in the grave. Well! what say you?"

"Anyway you're not going to duck Sally, for I've come along myself to stop you, so you'll have to let her go," broke in a burly local farmer, riding up at that moment. Turning to Pennock, he continued: "Now, George, you're always a great hand at using your fists; are you game for a round or two with the stranger? If so I'll see that there's fair play." Half an hour later the braggart and bully of the neighbourhood lay unconscious on the ground—thrashed as none had ever dreamt it possible.

"Well!" exclaimed his second in surprise, "you *have* got a leathering for once, my bonny lad; you've been asking for it for long and I must say you've only got your deserts. I don't know what will become of you now, my beaten gamecock!"

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"Why, then," broke in old Sally, pushing her way to the front of the crowd and leaning her chin upon the wrinkled hands which grasped her stick; "*I'll* tell all of you what'll become of him and what his end will be. It may help you to decide a knotty point a bit later on." Then, addressing her remarks to Pennock, who was now wiping his blood-stained face, the old dame said loud enough for all to hear :

"You have my curse upon you for the evil in your heart this day. You will work a greater evil than all the black deeds you have even now to answer for, and my curse is that *you will drown, yet you will not drown but you will die with your head under water.* There are more seeds in a poppy-head than days thou hast to live. Before those days remaining to you have passed you will be hunted like a hare and by hounds, one of which will never tire till at last it runs from scent to view."

At this date there was living at Catterick an old chap named Willie Boddy. He and his son were cobblers, and were known far and wide as "Auld Bill" and "Young Willie." Their shop, apart from being the clearing-house of local gossip, claimed a special notoriety on account of one of its windows possessing a far-famed "seeing-crystal." The father and son worked in the light under their bow casement window, which, like most others of those days, had a number of small, leaded, diamond-shaped panes. That which had a mystic power, both with regard to futurity and the past, was in the centre of the window, and was marked by a circular protuberance about the size of a crown piece and as bright and clear as crystal itself. Some said it had been brought from

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foreign climes to either Easby or Jervaulx Abbey, and had been let into the window above the High Altar so that its scintillating rays fell upon the pyx hanging in the sanctuary. And when the unhappy days of dissolution came, one of the priests who was given a pension settled at Scorton, in the very house in which Boddy now lived. Having secretly removed it from the Abbey, he let that particular pane of glass into the window because of its occult power. . . . To the end of his life he daily gazed into its heart to see if it would but tell him that abbot and monks would have restored to them that of which they had been robbed. Such was the story old Bill Boddy and others in the locality had always heard associated with the "seeing-crystal." In it he was wont to gaze with such intent abstraction that there seems little doubt he fell into a sort of cataleptic trance under the influence of which he was imbued with a descriptive power which he certainly did not normally possess. Time and time again the old cobbler had anticipated coming events, solved hidden mysteries, and discovered where stolen property lay concealed. Little wonder, therefore, that the crystal in the window became known over such a wide area.

The impromptu fight and Sally's enigmatic prophecy gave those around Scorton and Catterick a virile topic of conversation. Again and again were the cryptic words of the reputed witch reiterated and discussed. Had she not said that Pennock would add to his long list of ill-deeds one which would eclipse the rest?—*that* they could understand! but what meant she when she said that "he would drown, and that he would *not* drown," it

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seemed a paradox—an obvious contradiction—especially as she wound up by declaring that “he would die with his head under water.” When speculation and attempted interpretation were both dying down, a rumour went abroad that “Old Bill” had been “looking in his window and had started to mutter.” This was a sure omen that he “had seen summat in the crystal.” A customer taking a pair of boots to repair at a time when Young Willie was out, found the old man seated rigid on his bench gazing intently at the crystal, and speaking aloud as she entered. He was saying :

“Aye, they are coming along the bankside ; aye, a bonny couple ! and noo I see Pennock. What’s *he* after ? slinking up like a weasel behind ’em. He wanted to wed Polly, but she’d have nowt to say to him. God a marcy ; but he’s knocked Tom Kaye on t’ head, and there he lies on the bankside, either dead or dazed, and now the good-to-nowt has seized hold of Polly. Oh ! tha rascal, he’s——”

But so black, so outrageously wicked was the rest of the picture which the old man visualised and described, that afterwards men only discussed it amongst themselves, and women with their own sex.

The moment this story reached the ear of Tom’s closest friend, he said he must be warned at once ; but he learned from a neighbour that both Tom and his wife had gone that afternoon to Bolton-on-Swale, on a visit to the latter’s mother. He was also informed “that they intended returning by the bankside as they wished to gather some herbs—maybe that had detained them, as she had been expecting them home for nearly an hour.

Tom’s friend declared to several standing by he

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intuitively feared that what the crystal had told Auld Bill had really happened; anyway, he was going to see. Then others offered to join him; so a little party set out to search for Kaye and his wife. Within half an hour they found the former lying unconscious near the river, but Polly was nowhere to be seen. It was some hours before Tom was able to speak, and even then he could tell them nothing beyond the fact that he had been struck to the ground by a blow on the head; who struck the blow he could not say. The poor fellow did not know that his wife was missing. Those about him were compelled to invent some story to account for her absence, so they told him that she also had been murderously attacked, and was lying in her bed too ill to come to him. This sad news, though far from the real truth, threw him into a fever, and for long his life was despaired of.

In the meantime the whole countryside was wild with indignation and excitement. The river and every pool was dragged, and every place likely and unlikely was searched; but, when at the end of two days Polly was still missing, some of the searchers went to Sally Kildredth and begged of her to help them. "Take this," said the cripple, handing them a loaf of bread (see Note A). "Find a piece of money which Polly handled, rub it with quicksilver, push it into the middle of the loaf, throw it into the water a bit above where Tom was liggin', and follow it till it stops, an' then fling t' hooks in, for *there* lies Polly."

At length the loaf with its silvered coin, securely embedded inside, was thrown into the River Swale,

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and slowly the crowd followed its swirling rolling course ; now half-stopping o'er some deep still pool, only to turn and dip as if instinct with life, till nearing the edge, 'twas once again onward gently borne, resting on the stream's soft breast. Onward they watched it carried, now giving hope, now deceiving. Down, down, the stream they go, until some dipping branch with tender clasp would momentarily stay its journey, but with an easy grace it glides along, as if some lovely water-nymph with loving arms encircled it, and thus those two did waltz along together to the music of the rippling stream. Still on, on, on, with never an eye uplifted from that one pale floating object, that silent, solemn, fearful company move, until at last by some strange power it nearer yet nearer to the side is drawn. They whisper : " Is it the unseen outstretched hand of death which beckons ? " Nearer, yet nearer, until at last it stops—stops of its own accord—and then suddenly turns over thrice as if appealing to them ; then slowly, very slowly, beneath the surface sinks near to the roots of an old outspreading willow tree. The cruel-looking three-pronged hooks were lowered, then gently raised so that their points should neither mar nor mark the dead which they now had found.

Some were inclined to arrest Pennock at once ; others, more cautious, urged them to wait until after the inquest. But that same night it became known that Pennock had for some days been secretly disposing of all his belongings as if he meant to slip away. Suspicious as they naturally were, the cautious local constables would not act till " the crowner had sat on the body." Before

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the jury assembled it was announced that Pennock intended leaving Scorton, saying that he was going to spend a few days with an uncle at Richmond. Then a few decided it would be well to take the law into their own hands and arrest him on suspicion ; but whilst waiting on the bridge foot for the others to join them, a man riding past from Leeming—when he heard their intentions—told them they must be hoodwinked, for when he had passed the Salutation Inn he had seen Pennock getting his supper there. Back to Catterick they galloped telling all whom they saw that Pennock was giving them the slip. Everyone who had a horse soon joined, or followed after those who, with their dogs, had hurried to overtake the murderer, for such they had all decided that he was. It was then that one or two recalled that the witch was right anyway in saying that he would be hunted like a hare. Near to the Salutation they found Sally seated in a potman's cart.

“ You can all turn back,” said she, “ his day hasn't come yet. When he's found he'll be *there* ” (pointing towards a large stone horse-trough).

Pennock had few friends and many enemies, the latter of whom seemed to turn out *en masse* to join in the chase as though there had been a general call to arms throughout the locality. The hunt was indeed “ up,” galloping horsemen accompanied by their dogs shouted the news to those they passed : “ We're after Pennock. He's trying to ‘scape the law.’ ” His pursuers hoped to come up with him ere he reached the closed gates at Leeming Bar and there secure him. On, on they galloped into the night, and gradually four horsemen mounted on

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blood 'uns gained on their quarry as they neared The Leazes. Here the grassy horse-track by the side of the road ceased for some distance and Pennock heard the rattle of hoofs on the hard turnpike behind him. He knew as well as they that unless he could improve his pace capture must await him at Leeming ere the toll-barrier could be opened to give him passage. As he cursed and flogged and spurred he distinctly heard the threatening words ring out "Stop! or we'll fire." But Pennock knew that a galloping horseman, even in daylight, is no easy target, and so continued what was apparently a hopeless flight.

"You keep to the right and you to the left," instructed the leader of the quartette as they were nearing the gates, "and us two will get in front of him at the gate." Before they could carry this manœuvre into effect, however, Pennock whipped his horse round in the road, cleared the hedge into a big pasture field on the right, and disappeared into the night. Even in their disappointment his pursuers could not refrain from saying: "What a jump! and what a mare that is! she can stay for ever!"

There was nothing for it but to turn back homeward after an explanation to the pikeman, who had appeared trembling lest his toll-gate was to be the scene of one more bloody encounter between highwaymen and the officers of the law. Their horses were standing with shaking tails and distended nostrils, so they knew further chase was useless, especially as Pennock's mare seemed full of "go." On reaching the Salutation Inn they found old Sally sat there, unmoved, emotionless, inscrutable. She said, smiling: "I told you you'd never catch

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him—he never *will* be caught—but he'll be found here, not drowned but dead with his head under water."

"And when will that be, Sally?" inquired one.

"Why it'll be at the end of fifteen round ones," said she, declining to make her answer any plainer.

In time young Kaye was fully acquainted with the whole sad, sordid story. Then it was that the thirst for revenge entered like iron into his soul, a thirst which naught but blood could quench. None knew the unbearable sadness which grew in his heart when memories of the past and visions of the blighted, hopeless, empty, dead future came upon him.

By this time Sally Kildredth had taken her departure to Lancashire, but every syllable she had uttered had been repeated to the sorrowing husband. Not a word did he say to anyone; but like a flash the revelation came to him—that when Sally had said "at the end of fifteen round ones," she really meant that Pennock would be near to the Salutation at the end of fifteen full moons. To him it was clear that when she had made the seemingly contradictory statement that Pennock would drown, and then immediately afterwards said that he would not drown, she had omitted certain essential connecting words. This was a common practice with seers, and often made their prognostications difficult to comprehend. Had she added a word or two the riddle would have been easy of solution. His interpretation was "he will drown Polly (which he was convinced he *had* done), but he wont be drowned himself." What she meant by saying that he could not imagine; but he was sure all would come to pass as the old dame had said. And so days and weeks

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passed by and Tom Kaye, like others in the neighbourhood, patiently awaited the fulfilment of the mysterious prophecy.

About a hundred yards to the north of the Salutation Inn there was a little thatched cottage, tenanted by a widow who had one son, a stable-lad at the inn. It would be rather more than a year after the stirring events already recorded, that a young woman with a baby pleaded with this widow to take her in as a lodger. Who she was, where she came from, or what her business in the district was, no one ever knew. Naturally, there was a good deal of speculation, but whatever her secret was she kept it, all inquiries notwithstanding. It was about this time, too, that Tom Kaye began night and day to haunt the Salutation and its precincts. His friends, remembering what had been foretold, whispered to each other: "He's hanging about in the hopes of falling in with Pennock. He thinks he'll be sure to show up again at the fifteen months' end." There were those who endeavoured to reason with him and dissuade him from his daily vigil, pointing out the uselessness of nursing sorrow. To each he gave the same answer, when he deigned to reply at all, and it was the reply of a fatalist: "*What has to be will be. . . . I am waiting for one thing—waiting and watching!*"

The post-boys and others had promised to let Tom know if ever Pennock had the temerity to put in a reappearance, and the coachmen who came along this stretch of the Great North Road all knew the story and kept their eyes open for the missing man.

During the last days of October of that year winter

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commenced in earnest. It had been a fearful day, and there was every sign of it being a worse night. It hailed, and snowed, and blew, until every casement rattled and shook again. Several waggons had pulled up for the night, the drivers gladly seeking the welcome shelter always to be found within the sign of the Salutation. The waggoners, with Tom Kaye as a silent listener, gathered round the blazing fire, singing their songs and telling stories of days lang syne. The shout for ale, the hammering of the pewter pot upon the oaken table, the cloud of curling smoke, song and laughter, all spoke defiance of the stormy night without. But suddenly a blast of wind struck the place with such force that every sound was stilled, and every tongue was hushed. Then there seemed to pass round the old house more than over it, a long, sad, low wail; and hardly had it died away, when high overhead was heard by everyone the wild, blood-freezing howls and barks of the Gabriel ratchets (see Note B). Those in the stables and saddle-rooms heard them, the maids and others in the kitchen heard them, Tom Kaye and the others, in fact everyone about the hostelry heard them, and were struck dumb, as well they might be, for well every soul knew that someone present was marked for death before the morning sun should rise. But a moment later their terror was increased, for in the wake of that yelling, soul-chasing pack, there came upon all a stillness which could almost be felt.

But whilst the weird, soul-stirring howls of the deadly pack were still ringing in their ears, there arose yet another wail, but this time one of despair, fear, agony—death!

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Explanatory Notes

Note A.

The following extract, copied from an old diary kept by a schoolmaster named Naitby, of Bedale, is interesting in connection with the reclamation of dead bodies from water. Naitby, who was contemporary with the Scorton witch, and incidentally lived only a few miles away, recorded :—

“Old Plews hath just told us in Hird’s shop that when he was a lad he minds well one, an old witch named Dora, of Leeming Town, did always use in finding a drowned body the left forefoot (which he, Plews, called by name of hand) of a mowdywarp, which had to be caught above ground and then thrussen into the bigger half of a cob (loaf), which must be of a Friday’s baking ; the which had to be tossed by a true maid upon the stream, and it of a truth would keep the surface of the stream till it did come over the sunken corpse, when the hand within the cob would force the loaf down in its great determination to clutch the dead body. And this, Plews declareth, he hath seen done to the admiration of all onlookers.”

Note B

The same diarist makes the following reference to Gabriel ratchets :—

“A large white owl hath shown itself the last several nights, towards which the brown owls seem as though they paid homage. It seems as though it had no mate, and its call a solemn and doleful hoot, and it calleth at each hooting seven times, and then for a while resteth. Much was not considered of this at the time, but following close on this nine nights now gone, there raced the whole length of the town street, clear and loud, the yelp of the ratchets (*sic*). There is now a certainty of death to come amongst us. This is now for the third time within this present (?)

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that the ratchets' pack hath hunted for souls over Bedale (Oct. 18, 1775). But seven nights now gone since Gabriel's raced overhead, and now there has to come to us a blood-red moon, all sure signs that we are to be judged for our sins."

In another old MS. amongst my late father's collection are the following lines :—

"When ragged clouds race overhead,
Deep shadows ghostly marking
All spots where murders have been done,
Above you oft hear barking
The Ratchet Hounds, with fearful yelps,
Some death wraith through t' clouds chassing.
For so they mark, with yelp and bark,
A soul from earth is passing."

